

THE ARGOSY.

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THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FARM BY THE LOCH.

NIGHT was fast settling down over a wild mountain pass. There might be still a few pale sunset glories lingering in the west, but these could not be seen from the deep ravine, round which the great hills seemed, in the uncertain light, to draw closer and closer. It was a desolate spot. The straggling fringes of pines and firs, which softened the austerity of some of the fastnesses around, were wholly wanting here. The valley-bottom was chiefly swamp, rendered almost the more treacherous by the masses of stone which the storms of winter had hurled upon it from the hill-tops. No bird could build a nest in that valley. The sheep seldom wandered there. An eagle might occasionally career above it, and its scream would be the appropriate voice of the Spirit of Desolation which brooded over the place. But the only sound of its own was the lap of a flowing stream among the stones—a stream whose course one could easily imagine no human foot had ever tracked.

But stop! Can it be that in this lonesome valley even at this bewildering twilight hour there are voices?

The voices are those of two young men. They wear tourist suits of dark blue serge, and have knapsacks strapped to their shoulders. And they walk one behind the other, picking their way through the stony morass, but always hugging the bank of that little stream, as if it seemed to them a living guide through that Valley of the Shadow of Death.

He who walked first, George Vivian, was a young man of gallant bearing and handsome countenance, with the features which belong to those races and ranks of men who contend and command. And yet his face, altogether, had not their expression. Perhaps the fatigues and anxieties of a day of lost wandering had hollowed it a little.

relaxing the firmer lines of the mouth. Perhaps the eyes were too large, or the complexion too effeminate, for its native delicacy asserted itself, even in spite of the sun-browning of a pedestrian tour.

His companion, Allan Grale, was scarcely as tall, and followed on his springy steps with a firmer tread. He had curling chesnut hair, a florid, healthy complexion, and a face of that rather commonplace order which is generally styled "good-looking." Perhaps a subtle physiognomist, looking keenly, might have shaken his head.

"Well!" cried George Vivian, springing on a boulder rather higher and bigger than the rest, and then stopping short, and looking round. "Well! when at noon to-day we first found that we had left the right road, I wish I had remembered the old saying: that when you lose yourself, the best way is to turn back, retrace your steps, and then start again fair."

"It's a pity you did not think of that at the right time," said Allan Grale, standing behind him. "It's too late now."

"I did think of it," admitted George, moving forward. "But the scenery was so grand, that the temptation to go on was great. I could not believe we had got very far out of the right way. This stream must end somewhere; probably in the lake itself. And that is, in a way, our proper goal."

"It does not follow that there will be any accommodation for travellers when we get there," returned Allan, with a laugh.

"There may be a sheiling or a shanty of some sort; there generally is. At least we shall know where we are."

"It will be dark presently," said Allan; "and then, if the moon does not shine, I suppose there will be nothing for us but to wait where we are till dawn."

George Vivian gave a shiver. "We must press on while we can."

"What a nine days' wonder it would make in Dering if we suddenly disappeared!" mused Allan. Unlike his companion, he was an unimaginative man, and found only a half-agreeable sensation in turning over the thought of horrors, which set all George's nerves ajar. "The governor would think I had run off, and begin overhauling my desks and documents. He would find some things which might rather astonish him, poor old man!"

"Aye—I'm afraid that would be the case with too many of us," responded George fervently. "We have not always been wise. Well, if anything happened to me, there are some papers of mine which I hope Maria might be the first to come across. Maria would do her best to be kindly to—everybody!"

"Confound it!" cried Allan Grale, "there's one little box of mine that will keep coming into my head, ever since we lost ourselves to-day. I ought to have thought about it before I came away. It's too late, now."

"I don't know how it is, Allan," said George not unkindly, but in response to something in Allan's tone which had jarred upon him,

"at times there's something about you which makes me wonder why I like you so much, why I like you at all. I wish I knew which side of you is really you!"

Allan laughed again, not in the least offended. "A little of both, I expect," he answered.

"I don't mean that you are ever worse than other fellows," George hastened to explain; "I believe, at your worst, you are better than most. I tell Maria so. I stand up for you in that quarter, believe me."

All along their way, even as an accompaniment to their conversation, Allan had kept up gay little whistlings, as he scrambled on. Perhaps this had served to keep the silence of the gloomy pass from pressing too hard upon his careless soul! But now these sounds ceased.

"I wonder if Maria will ever marry me," he said suddenly, in a voice which scarcely seemed his own.

"Of course she will," answered George, "when you've made up your quarrel. See! we have not been losing our time and strength after all. I think the lake cannot be far off now."

For the valley was opening before them, with a sudden descent to lower ground, and the little stream changed its even course for a series of low, leaping waterfalls.

But while renewed hope brought new vigour to their wearied limbs, the difficulties of their way were doubled. The light was almost gone now: there was no path anywhere, and no progress but by scrambling or leaping from boulder to boulder by the little river's course, such boulders being slippery with wet moss and water weed, and often so poised as to sway beneath the wariest step. George Vivian, eager and heedless with the thought that it might be still possible to escape a night's camping out, had several slips, and though he saved himself from sprains and fractures, did not manage to keep out of the water, and as he grew wetter, grew also but more zealous and rash.

At last, dark as it was, they were sure that their wanderings had fairly changed in scene. The ground was once more tolerably level, though they still had many a stumble. It was some time since they had scrambled down by the last waterfall: the river was gurgling peaceably over a flat of shingle, and the mountains seemed to have drawn themselves further off, so that the darkness was less oppressive.

"What is that before us?" asked George, suddenly standing still. "I think this must be Loch Maree itself!"

"Perhaps the wish is father to the thought," said young Grale. "Look! What was that gleam? Can it be the reflection of a star?"

"I think it's too dark for that," answered George, moving again. "Let us proceed. If we had but moonlight!"

In a very few minutes there remained no doubt that they had reached the mouth of the little Highland river and the shore of the great Highland lake. This point had been their wished-for goal for many hours past, but they did not find much to elate them now. The

silent desolation here seemed only wider, and not less than that of the valley they had left behind.

"I warned you not to expect to find a first-class hotel, George."

"But they did say there was a farm at this end of the lake. I remember that well: the hotel people said there were boats to be hired there. The farm was called Dagan, or Kagan, or some queer name like that—Gaelic I suppose. They said it had a beautiful view up the loch: and that it sometimes took boarders."

"We are scarcely at the end of the loch," observed Allan, peering into the darkness. "We are on the side. I can make out that much now, even in this gloom, by the way the hills lie. But, remember! the river lies between it and us—and it's pretty broad and strong now."

George stopped in dismay as he peered about him. "The river seemed shallow enough as we came by the side," he observed. "It looks formidable now. But we can both swim a little."

"Speak for yourself," said the other. "Not that I should be afraid if it were light. Still these mountain rivers have treacherous bottoms. Stop!—what could that gleam have been? We both saw it, didn't we? Suppose we watch for it a little."

They stood in silence—Allan's hand on George's shoulder—and watched intently. There was nothing. George gave a convulsive shiver, he felt deadlly cold.

"I shall take the river," he said determinedly; "anything is better than staying here."

Allan Grale jumped in after his impatient friend. The water slopped over their feet, then against their knees—but, feeling a-head with their staves, they waded onward. Often they had to pause, their sticks warning them of depths which they did not care to sound. Suddenly, Allan, poking about, gave a joyful cry. "Surely this is earth! Yes, this is grass, here is a bush—here is a tree! The river is not so wide as I thought, after all. But gently; this is not the opposite shore! This is only an island, and I'm afraid—Hark!"

They stood together at the other side. There was a fierce sound of water at their feet, as if the mountain torrent swirled round within some dreadful pass before it hastened on to join the calmer waves of the loch. Allan felt for the bottom with his stick: but the staff found no bottom!

"We should be over our heads there, George," he said: "and even good swimming might not help one if there is a hole. I fear we are worse off here than we have been yet."

"I thought I saw the light again," interrupted George.

Mr. Grale saw the gleam too. "It is very faint," he said. "I lose sight of it, and when I see it again it is in another place—I can't help thinking that it is a light held by somebody in a boat."

"Let us shout!" cried George, eagerly. "If they hear us, surely they will come to the rescue."

They both lifted their voices at once—George in a ringing cry for

"Help here"—Allan in a vigorous "Coo-e-e," which he had learned from some returned Australian.

The great mountains caught up their cries and repeated them to each other, like a circle of mocking Trolls. But before the last echo of their voices had died away, it was mingled with another—a lusty shout of willing and helpful succour.

"Thank God!" said George Vivian earnestly.

Presently, they could hear the measured dipping of the oars, and then the voices of the rowers in consultation.

"We are standing by the tree on the island in the river," shouted Allan. "Can you take us off; or shall we try for some other point?"

A voice replied: "We can take you from there. Don't attempt to move. You are surrounded by bad places."

It was a young man's voice, refined in accent. Miserable as he was, George's imagination instantly began to arrange the unknown into picturesque form. "These must be gentle-people," he thought. "Visitors at a neighbouring hotel perhaps; or may be a laird's family returning from some expedition."

Clearly the water was deep there. For the boat came close up without any grazing, and bumped against the bank. Three people were in her, a shrouded form sitting astern, and two men in kilts, one of whom managed the oars, while the other held out helping hands.

"Let us sit as far from you as we can," said Mr. Vivian with courtesy, "we are dripping wet. We do not know how to thank you."

"You might have easily been drowned if you had tried the Ragan side of the river," said one of the men, not the one who replied to their shouts, for this voice was older and gruffer.

"It was my cousin Morna who heard you," said the younger of the two men. "She made us stop. And even then, we were not sure but we might be answering the cry of some startled bird."

"I was quite sure," said the shrouded form, in a sweet, low voice.

"And the lady heard while you were rowing!" exclaimed George.

"I was listening when I heard the cry," she whispered.

"I am sure this has been most providential for us," he said, turning towards her. "I only fear that we are at present too worn out and wretched to manifest the real warmth of our gratitude."

"Show it where it is due—to Heaven," returned the sweet, low voice. "It is the heart which is read there."

"It seemed rather cool—our hailing your boat," Allan was remarking to the men; "but utter misery always looks for mercy. We were trying to cross the river in quest of a farm which we had heard stood hereabouts, and on whose hospitality we intended to throw ourselves."

"Our farm," said the young man, quietly, "for I suppose you must mean Ragan. Well, I can promise you a kind welcome. I am the farmer's nephew, Colin Vass, and that is his daughter, Morna McOrist."

It was quite plain what the gleam had been which the travellers had seen. Morna held in her hand a small lantern, intended to guide the steps of the party to and from the boat. It shed a flickering light around, but the young lady remained in deepest shadow. At last the boat grated on the shingle, and her cousin took the lantern from her, that she might spring ashore. As he returned it, it illuminated her face, and, bringing it out in strong relief from the surrounding blackness, probably intensified the transparent delicacy of the complexion, the bright gold of the hair, and the poetic fervour of the eye.

"There is a footpath from the landing-point to Ragan," she said, softly, "please to follow me." And as she stepped forward, they followed behind, side by side.

"We expected to get the coach from this point to-morrow, so as to meet our letters and luggage by noonday," whispered George, to Mr. Grale. "I suppose we can do that, yet—I want my letters."

"Miss McOrist," said Allan, "when does the next coach pass here?"

"Not till to-morrow afternoon," she replied.

"Then there is no way of starting for Dingwall earlier than that?"

"Yes, there is," she answered. "A conveyance starts from the hotel below this at six o'clock to-morrow morning. It is not altogether a public conveyance. It runs for the convenience of a gentleman who rents the shooting lodge, and he is always willing to take up travellers."

"And how far off is the hotel? I think I will go on to it."

"Exactly one mile," answered Morna. "But surely you must be fatigued enough. And you are wet. The hotel, too, is full. You could scarcely get accommodation there."

"I'll chance it," decided the young man. "Vivian, you go on to Ragan; you are much more done up than I am; and both of us need not miss the kind chance of a comfortable resting place. I've got dry clothes with me, you know. And I'll secure seats in this conveyance, and look for you to-morrow morning. Mind you don't oversleep yourself. And you must return thanks to our hosts for both of us."

"And, if it suits you better, be quite sure that you may return to Ragan," interposed Morna. "A Highland house is a stranger's home."

CHAPTER II.

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

As they neared Ragan, their steps awakened sounds of life and household interest, which struck George Vivian's ear with a note of welcome, after the fierce silence of the day.

The low house door stood open, with such a glow of warm light streaming through it that, as George followed the Highland girl, he was nearly blinded. But he soon recovered his dazzled vision, and

found himself addressed by a tall spare elderly man, and an equally tall spare woman, much his junior, but pale and faded; while a buxom barefooted lass, in a pink jacket and a very short skirt, was hurrying to and fro, and talking in unknown tongues to Morna McOrist.

There was no hesitancy as to George's remaining there for the night. Both Morna and the servant girl presently vanished upstairs, and George heard hasty footsteps running to and fro overhead. He felt the sudden warmth and light and sense of security almost overpowering. But when his room was announced as ready, he assured his hosts that he would presently return to the family apartment in a fit state to enjoy their kindness.

The bed chamber to which he was shown, was a long low room. On either side, from a very few feet above the floor, the walls sloped inwards, and met in the middle in a sort of rude pointed arch. On an open hearth, a few logs and peats, hastily kindled, were already crackling and sparkling cheerily. The floor was of bare wood, spread here and there with the skins of oxen and deer. The furniture was of the slightest: a chair, a table, a black-framed mirror, dim with the damp of years, and coarse toilet pottery set out on a bench beneath the little window in the roof, through whose curtainless panes only the stars could peep. But the bed, with its plain white hangings and scarlet coverlid looked positively luxurious, and on it were spread sundry cosey flannel garments in which George felt he was expected to array himself. He could not understand how there had been time to prepare so much.

He had not been in his room many minutes before he heard a knock at the door. It made him start, it was so singular a knock, like one sharp blow given by a heavy staff. He cried "Come in." Not being responded to, he opened the door and looked out.

There was nobody there. Sufficient light streamed through the open door downstairs for him to see everything distinctly. He could hear the voices of the household below. George closed the door again, thinking to himself, "What strange tricks one's fancy plays one in unfamiliar places! Doubtless that was some freak of the wind!"

When he went downstairs he found considerable additions had been made to the frugal meal, originally spread for Morna and her cousin. A bowl of "Athol brose" was giving forth its steaming fragrance, and there was a plate of honey in the comb, and a basin of some rich creamy compound; to say nothing of a cold joint of savoury Highland mutton, and a huge uncut cheese. George thought with a friendly regret that Allan Grale would scarcely fare so well.

As if she read his thoughts, the elder lady said, in her slow, stately English, spoken with precision like a foreign tongue—

"We are sorry your friend deserted you. And we hope that he will not be disappointed in finding quarters and be forced to return. But we heard this evening that some foreign travellers had taken

possession of the hotel, and that there would be no more accommodation for anybody till they were gone."

"It may be only a rumour, Janet," said the farmer, Hector McOrist. The solemn demeanour of the old couple almost overawed George. Kind they certainly were; kind in word and in act; but they spoke and moved with the grave dignity of princes.

"A storm is rising, observed the nephew, Colin Vass, but it won't break for two or three hours yet; so your friend will be settled either here or there by that time."

"Ah, I thought the wind must be rising," said George: "for somebody or something knocked sharply at my door while I was upstairs. I opened it and could see nothing—so it may have been the wind."

He could not understand the effect of this simple speech. Everybody turned to gaze fixedly at him as he uttered it, and then they looked at each other. The mother gave a low wailing sound; which, it occurred to George, must be like the first note of a Highland "keen." Old Hector McOrist moved across the floor with a heavy, measured step, and closed the door of the apartment, hitherto open. The action was common-place enough, but George felt that it had a significant bearing on some inner thought. As for the young man, Colin, as he turned suddenly and moved nearer the fire, he uttered a short exclamation, seemingly of irritation and impatience. Whereupon his uncle looked towards him and, with harsh dignity of manner, spoke a few words in Gaelic. As for Morna, she sat perfectly motionless, her pale face visibly paler.

George wondered whether he had unwarily touched the key of some family skeleton cupboard. He tried to divert their thoughts.

"I suppose the scenery of your loch is about as romantic as any in Scotland," he said, "and it interests the imagination. In some of the lonely glens we have come through to-day, it really seemed quite easy to believe in fairies and witches."

"Even you, coming from different scenes and associations, could feel that?" said Colin Vass, half-interrogatively. "Well, can you wonder at the effect produced by those glens on those shut up in them from generation to generation? It is impossible for us to shake off their influence."

Morna said something softly to her cousin—so softly that George could not be sure whether she spoke English or Gaelic—and glanced towards her father.

"The noblest races, the races which have ruled the world," said George, "have come from hill countries. Therefore, if such races have a stronger consciousness of the unseen than others, would it not be wiser to inquire whether this may not be one of the roots of their greatness, rather than rashly to pronounce it their sole weakness?"

The aged Highland man held out his hand to George. "You speak well," he said. "You come from the south, and have seen much, and, doubtless, have its learning and its graces. I will speak

no more against the colleges, as I have done since Colin came back."

Colin's handsome face flushed.

"I suppose some of the ancient faiths still linger in these quiet corners," said George, "though tourists, rushing through from hotel to hotel, may scarcely imagine it. Have you, yourselves, ever known anyone possessing the far-famed Highland gift of second sight?"

They did not seem to notice his question; at least, it remained unanswered. Morna sat absolutely motionless, and George fancied that her father stole a glance towards her. Colin's lip curled.

"At any rate, there are plenty of witches," he said: "but even those are dying out."

"Colin," said Morna, speaking English in her sweet, quiet voice, "do you remember Elspeth Ross, the old henwife? and how she always said that she saw a dead man standing upright beside the bridge that crosses the Vossie, between this and the hotel? And do you remember how many accidents took place there? All the accidents on the road were at that spot, though there was nothing in itself to account for this. And you know, Colin, when the new bridge was made, that the men, digging, found a skeleton ——"

"With all the clothing on, and the bony hands clenched," observed her mother. "And it is buried in the graveyard, with the story of its finding graven on the stone."

Oh, I remember all about it!" said Colin. "I remember the tales of that Elspeth Ross."

There was a moment's silence. "Then there is the well," resumed Morna, very softly.

"Aye, there is the well!" echoed her father, with a world of bitter meaning in his voice.

"There is the well," repeated Colin, quite coolly. "You may have heard, sir, that on an island in the middle of our loch, there is a marvellous well?"

"I think I have," replied George Vivian. "And of some verses written in its honour."

"There have been many such," remarked Colin. "Its reputation was, that if an insane or melancholy person drank of its water, the disease left him."

"I have seen people who were so cured," said the old farmer. "It was a famous well. Pilgrims came from far and near, great folks some of them. In those days the lairds around came of good Celtic blood. We had no rich upstarts then, going to law with each other about ancient boundaries, and turning away the widow and the fatherless, to house their dogs and horses in their stead."

"That's all quite true," assented Colin, warmly. "Many good things vanished with the old days: and I'm not going to defend Mr. Weatherfield, or anything that he did."

"Who is Mr. Weatherfield?" asked George Vivian.

"A person who bought the neighbouring estate of Appleton," Colin answered. "A London man; I don't know what he is exactly, but he is very rich, and is a director of railway companies and the like."

"I can understand the sort of person," said their guest. "And what did he do?"

"Well, he made fun of the famous well, and scoffed at the people for believing in it. And at last, one day, when he had a picnic on the island, to show his contempt for the whole thing, he threw his pet puppy into the water."

"The well dried up there and then, and has remained dry ever since," said the farmer, with impressive solemnity.

"That is really so," added Colin. "But for other wonders and superstitions that live amongst us —"

"This is neither the time nor the place to talk of them," interrupted his uncle.

There was a silence. George felt that the conversation had better be changed again.

"I fear I am keeping you from your slumbers," he said, politely. "I wonder if there is any possibility of my unlucky friend's returning? I am quite prepared to keep watch for him alone, if you allow me."

"I think we will go to rest," said the mistress of the house; who, mostly silent herself, had been closely observant of her husband and daughter. "Colin will gladly remain up with you."

But, before they retired, the master summoned the serving maiden and the shepherd—the other man who had been in the boat—for household worship. For the benefit of these, this was conducted in Gaelic, but an English Bible with metrical Psalms was put into George's hands, and he knew that their wild plaintive lilting expressed the words, which, heard there and then, seemed full of vivid significance.

"The lofty mountains shall bring forth
Unto the people peace;
Likewise the little hills the same"
Shall do by righteousness."

Amid the bustle of the family's retirement, the young Highlander noticed that his guest looked wistfully towards the door. The heat of the low room, grateful enough at first, had grown oppressive.

"You feel the room close, I fear," said Colin courteously. "If you are sufficiently rested, perhaps you may like a few minutes' turn in front of the house? We shall but see your friend the sooner if he is coming back."

Young Vivian gladly assented, and they went out. Except for the light streaming from the windows and doors of the house, all was the blackness of darkness. It was, of course, cooler outside than within, but it was close enough.

"There is thunder at hand," observed Colin.

George could not help thinking of the conjecture by which he had

accounted for the knock on his bedroom door. There certainly was not a breath of wind astir now.

"I don't know how I can thank you enough for all your kindness to an utter stranger," he said. "And what an interesting life you must have here."

"Probably you would find it rather dull, if taken all the year round," answered Colin, quietly, with a slight emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Dull!" echoed George, "why, my dear fellow, you have far more romance and 'life' amid these solitudes than is possible to the dwellers in great cities. But I was afraid that something I said did not please your aunt and uncle."

"It was not your fault," said Colin. "You could not know what you were doing."

"To tell you the whole truth," George went on, in his charming confidential manner, "I thought afterwards I must have opened out on one of your quaint, poetic superstitions."

"They are not superstitions to those who believe them," said Colin with the same grave manner: "they are terrible realities. Nay, they are terrible realities to some who do not altogether believe them—like me. Terrible—in their results."

"You give me a curious creeping sensation," said George.

"It is not to be wondered at," Colin went on. "For you may consider that to-night you have received a sign from a spirit-hand."

George Vivian stood still. "That knock!" he exclaimed.

"That knock," assented the young Scotchman. "You have told me nothing about it: I will describe it as it should be, and you will say whether I am right. It was one heavy thud upon your door—such a blow as might be given by a shepherd's crook."

"Exactly," answered Mr. Vivian.

"It is a tradition among the McOrists," narrated Colin, as they took another turn, "that a McOrist was, by chance, a guest among the Macdonalds of Glencoe on the night of their massacre by the Campbells. That night, his wife at home in her own house not far from this, heard that sound. Ever since, where it has been heard, it is held as the presage of misfortune—of doom hanging over the hope of the house where it sounded."

"And in this case the hope is——?"

"My cousin Morna," said Colin, with a forced quietness. "Now you can understand what an effect such superstitions may have—and why I combat them, as I do, so resolutely!" he added, bitterly.

"Could I have dreamed of such a thing, I would have died rather than mention it," spoke the young man. "O, might not you have checked me? I think I should have heeded the least sign!"

"I could not. It was too late."

"And has it been heard often, and is it always right?" came the next forlorn enquiry.

"It has been heard several times : it is said to be always right," Colin answered. "There are McOrists who die without having heard it. It has always come unexpectedly for the young and the vigorous, those whom our people call 'the desired.' It is said to be always heard on the day when the end begins."

George made no answer.

"There is one thing special about its occurrence this time," Colin went on presently : "I have never before heard of the knock coming to a stranger—to one not of McOrist blood, or allied by marriage. You have no McOrist blood?" he asked abruptly.

The proud Highlander did not fear to put the plain question, simple mountaineer as he was, though he could recognise in his guest every trait of a gentleman of polite breeding and fortune.

"No," George Vivian answered pondering. "No, certainly not, as far as I can tell—and I know a good deal about my family tree for many generations."

"I must dwell upon that," said Colin, emphatically. "It will weigh more with them than any amount of reasoning. Only my cousin Morna is a singular girl," went on the simple-hearted young Highlander. "She seems but half in this world. She had some strange dream last night; she said so at breakfast; and all the morning, I saw her keep leaving the house and stand gazing over the loch. And when we were in the boat, she would scarcely speak—but seemed always listening. And I believe that was how she heard your call. I don't know how I can speak of such things to a stranger, but after your hearing that knock—whatever it be—you seem like one of ourselves."

"Hurrah!" shouted a cheerful voice out of the darkness. It was Allan Grale, pelting along. "I was afraid I should find myself shut out here, too, and have to knock you up. The hotel is all absorbed by some foreign potentate, but the landlady made me have supper in her own parlour, and lent me dry shoes and stockings, which I am to return to-morrow when we take our seats in the early coach. So we must be up sharp and bright, Vivian. I vote we turn in at once."

Allan's cavalier manner jarred upon George Vivian after the simple stateliness of the McOrists. The young Highlander, the acquaintance of two or three hours, had come nearer to George's inner life than ever had Allan Grale, his old neighbour and familiar comrade.

But Colin Vass did not seem to resent the easy way in which the young Englishman took possession of his kindness. He went with them to their bedroom door and bade them Good-night with great cordiality, looking straight into George's eyes as he did so. They found that another bed had been made up in readiness for Allan's possible return, and the young man looked round and pronounced everything "awfully jolly." But not one word of the strange incident which had befallen him, nor of his subsequent conversation with his host, did George say to his companion. He was in bed first and sank down luxuriously into its snowy depths,

"I think," said he, speaking dreamily, as people often do when their innocent-sounding words have some close link with a deep and secret thought of their own souls, "I think that this would be the very place to seek rest in, if one's life had something in it out of the common run—that sort of misfortune or mystery which the idle world delights to peck and carp at. The people have high minds and simple hearts. If I had made some kind of mistake, even if one had committed a crime, they would never suspect it until they knew—and if they knew, I think they still could pardon."

Allan Grale heard the words, heedlessly, almost unwittingly. Little did he suspect when and where they would return upon him!

CHAPTER III.

WHAT COULD IT MEAN?

EVEN through the storm that presently arose, the young men slept the deep sleep of youth and health and weariness. Colin Vass, accustomed to early hours, called them in the morning, and when, after their hasty toilet, they descended to the parlour, they found an ample breakfast already spread. The barefooted serving maiden was in attendance, but of the family Colin alone was present.

"My uncle is aged, and my aunt is feeble," he said, as if in indirect apology for their absence. "They depute many of their duties to me, and I have to fill their place in the best way I can."

Breakfast over, Colin said he would walk with them to the point where the bye-path of Ragan joined the main road. As they passed out of the house, George Vivian turned and looked back at it. Nobody was to be seen. Only one little casement was set wide open, and its dainty muslin curtain fluttered in the morning breeze. Surely that was Morna's chamber, and she must be already astir! George felt a twinge of wonder why she had not come out to say Good-bye.

He could not guess that last night Morna's mother had stood by her daughter's bedside, speaking in a voice of terrified love.

"Child, who can say what is meant by this that has happened this evening? A stranger has heard the warning that has hitherto been kept for the McOrists. The voice of my heart says, 'Beware of that stranger.'"

Morna lay silent.

"Perhaps," her mother went on, "he was permitted to hear that knock, and unwittingly to tell us about it, that we might understand that danger approached you through him!"

"Mother!" cried Morna with maidenly sense of insult.

"We know not how it might come," went on Mrs. McOrist, laying her hand on her daughter's head; "but we know it cannot signify to you either way; therefore see him not again before he departs. Your

father and I will keep our room, too, so that he may mark no significance in your absence. We should not do this if we felt not deeply," she added, "The head of the McOrists is not wont to leave the deoch an dorus* to be handed over his threshold even by his nearest kin:men."

"Of course, I shall do as you wish, mother," said Morna, meekly.

And then the eagle-faced woman, her proud reserve breaking down, had caught the slight girl in passionate arms, crying:

"Heart of our life—our last, our loveliest! we could not give you up! We could not spare you, either to life or to death. A home in a stranger's land seems a roof less kindly than even the green sods of our own glen. But what am I saying?—Ochone! Ochone!"

With one convulsive clasp, which Morna returned as warmly, but more gently, she quitted the room.

The girl fell back on her pillow exhausted. Her slight frame was as ill fitted to meet gusts of emotion as it was to encounter the thunderstorm then raging round the house.

"How glad I am I did not tell my mother all my dream!" she sighed. "I fear I did tell her almost too much. But she does not allude to it now. Can it have slipped from her mind, or does she remember it only too well?"

There was little more sleep for Morna that night. When George Vivian looked back at Ragan next morning, she was seated in her chamber, fully dressed, but out of sight. Morna was not a girl to peep. But when the voices of the travellers retreated until they passed quite out of hearing, when she knew they must have reached the highway, then she rose and stood full in the casement. Her cousin Colin was already returning towards Ragan; and hastening down the road which wound like a white thread round the green robes of the hills, she could see two figures. She watched for a moment, and then went downstairs to meet Colin.

"Then the other gentleman did come back last night!"

"Yes," said Colin, "but you did not miss anything in not entertaining him. He is quite a commonplace young tourist. The McOrist ghost would not have interfered with him," he added, with a forced laugh.

Morna raised her blue eyes to her cousin's face, and said nothing.

Meantime the two young travellers sped cheerily on their way. George Vivian might feel that he would like to go back to Ragan some day, but at present he only wanted to reach the Highland Capital, where he expected that letters were awaiting him. He had been a little nervous before about what news those letters might bring; and somehow that mysterious knock had not made him less anxious. Certainly he had not the precise, unreasoning faith of the Highlanders themselves, but he had a feeling that there was "something at the bottom of these things and that one never knew what it might be.

They arrived at the hotel in plenty of time to make all their arrange-

* A parting attention. *Anglice*, a stirrup cup.

ments comfortably, and were soon bowling along, behind two good horses. The morning was lovely, the scenery through which they drove was alternately savagely grand and smilingly beautiful. At a certain point they left their conveyance, and caught a train which speedily took them to the town for which they were both longing. It had historic and picturesque interests of its own, but they both meant to leave it as soon as they had got their letters.

These were soon secured. Allan had only two, neither of which seemed of absorbing interest to him, though his face was none the brighter when he had read them. George had three or four: one a thick budget directed in a lady's free, elegant writing, on which Allan Grale cast a wistful eye, for it was from George's sister, Maria Vivian. But George himself thrust all his epistles into his pocket for more leisurely perusal—all, save one; a letter superscribed in a straggling Italian hand, and with the writing in the inside showing through the common envelope. It did not take long to read, and then a look of vexation and distress settled on the young man's face.

"We must lose no time in getting trains south from this place," said young Vivian. "I must be in London, if possible, to-morrow—I think it can be done by travelling all night."

They had to hurry over their lunch, to catch the train. When seated in it, George composed himself to read his other letters. One or two were insignificant enough, but he read his sister's letter carefully, twice over.

"Nothing but trouble everywhere," was his exclamation. There's my brother home from college, with a grand disappointment of every one of my uncle's ambitions for him. I can't make it out myself. I thought Edgar would distinguish himself highly, and he has not done a single thing. I don't believe that can be the worst of it. Every effect has a cause. There must be something behind."

"Probably," laughed Allan.

"And disappointment makes the old General very irritable. He has been as a father to us, and we have both disappointed him."

"I wonder if my mother and Mary Anne are back at Dering from their visit to Redbourne," observed Allan, after a long silence.

A curious expression, something, as it seemed, between alarm and impatience, flitted across George Vivian's face.

"It was a great mistake that they ever went there," said he.

"I don't see why; any way, it was all your fault," returned Allan. "You came home with such pretty sketches of the place and such loud praises of it, that they picked up the idea of its being a sort of earthly Paradise!"

"And they probably found it only a Sleepy Hollow."

Allan Grale settled himself, drew his cap over his eyes, and dropped asleep. George sat silently for a while, gazing on the beautiful scenery through which they were passing but without seeing it. Presently a sense of weariness stole over him, and he also slept.

He could not tell how long he slept—only a few minutes, it seemed, and yet when he woke with a sudden start, everything around had strangely changed. The very character of the country was different—the mountains lay far away, a dim blue line, beyond reaches of field and pasture land. The glare of the sun was softened too, and the trees cast long shadows.

The train was stopping at a small station. One or two country people were getting in and out. The railway porter went to and fro, shouting an unintelligible word. George leaned out of the window.

"Are we near Perth?" he asked.

"Perth!" echoed the porter, coming to the door and opening it: "You're all wrong for Perth, sir. You ought to have changed into a main-line carriage long ago."

"Eh! what's up?" cried Allan, waking in confusion.

"If you're going to get out, better make haste, sir; train moving on," warned the porter.

They bundled up their traps, and obeyed. The train moved off slowly, leaving them behind, disconsolate enough.

"Awkward mistake, gentlemen," said the station-master, civilly, taking in the situation. "There are big notices printed on the platforms where you ought to change, and the officials do their best too—but at this time of year, sir, things are hurried and irregular."

"We were sound asleep, having been much fatigued yesterday," said George. "What's to be done? First of all—where are we?"

"At Savoch," answered the station-master.

"Savoch!" echoed Allan Grale, surprised, but with something like recognition in his voice. "How can we get from here to Perth?"

"You can't get to Perth from here at all," said the station-master

"You will have to go back to the junction."

"And when can we do that?"

"Not before seven o'clock to-morrow morning," answered the man, promptly. "There's a train runs then from here to catch the early train going south. I expect that's what you want," he added, civilly.

"George groaned. "Yes," he said, "but we wanted the train to-night, to reach London to-morrow morning."

The station-master was silent. He did not need to utter the unpleasant words, "It cannot be done." Facts could say that for themselves.

"We shall get in to-morrow afternoon, and be at Dering by the evening," said Allan, who was in no particular hurry to bring his holiday to an end.

"Then there's nothing for us but to put up here for the night," returned George, turning on his heel with a disappointed air.

"And I'll take you where to put up," said Allan, eagerly. "Will you believe it, Vivian, that I have an aunt in this very place? I was here once before, ages ago, when I was a little fellow."

"Well, that is a strange coincidence," exclaimed George, brightening

into a better humour, though his eyebrows were still knit. "It is a wonder you did not think before of paying her a visit, when you were so near. I could have gone on alone, you know."

"One night of it, even with you to take care of me, will be quite enough," nodded Allan. "The Gibsons are dreadfully dismal, stiff people. And I'm not quite sure whether my paying a formal visit would be quite approved of at home, you know; but my mother will be glad enough to get news in this accidental way."

"They are her own relatives, I suppose?"

"Yes. Mrs. Gibson is my mother's sister," explained Allan, as they tramped along the flat road between dreary stone dykes. "Her husband is the parish schoolmaster; he is a university man, and when she married him, he was intending to enter the Church—the Scotch Church, of course. Of the two sisters, my aunt was then believed to have made the better match. I think my mother made my father feel it so at the time. I know he has constantly reminded her since that it was a mistake."

"Was your uncle never ordained?"

"I really don't know," Allan admitted. "I think I've seen a card with 'Reverend' on it, so I suppose he must have been. But I fancy he never succeeded in getting a church for himself. There's the house," broke off Allan. "We have not lost ourselves this time."

It was impossible to imagine a scene more different from that of the previous evening. The minister's house—for George supposed he must be one, though he might not have a church of his own—was a grey square block, standing on one side of the road, facing the school, an oblong grey block on the other. One tree, stunted in growth and scant of foliage, stood beside the house, and flat turnip fields closed around the low wall which enclosed the little garden. One shuddered to think what the scene must be when skies were lowering, and earth was dank. For it looked unutterably common and dreary, even in the magic light of the early summer evening. As they drew near, George's artist-eye saw that the dismal scene was not without its appropriate human figure. At the gate, set in the low stone wall, stood a tall man, clad in black, his iron grey hair uncovered. He was looking down the road towards them, shading his eyes with his hand.

"This is my uncle," whispered Allan: and George thought that this grim old gentleman seemed looking out for the travellers, even as the sweet maiden, Morna McOrist, had seemed listening for them.

Allan stepped forward and took the schoolmaster's hand, hastily introducing himself. The hand was almost withheld, and the weatherbeaten face was kept suspiciously closed until that self-introduction was fully made out. Even then the welcome was not warm.

"A friend of yours," Mr. Gibson asked, turning to George.

"Yes; my fellow traveller, and a very great friend of mine in Dering," Allan replied.

"Well," said the old gentleman in a resigned tone, "well, we'll do our best for you. The wife was baking scones this morning."

He led the way into the house, stopping in the little hall. "Marget—Marget!" he called out; here's somebody to see you."

Marget obeyed with undue haste for her weary and toil-worn face and frame. She gave a strange little moan when she saw Allan, whom she seemed to recognise at once, probably from family resemblances. The hand she held out to George Vivian visibly trembled.

"And how were all when you left them?" she asked of her nephew. "My poor sister! I suppose we are never to see each other again in this world."

"Oh, don't say that! who knows?" said Allan. "You ought to run up to London some day, and see her, and all the sights."

"You don't live in London now."

"Dering is not so far away from it. But I think my mother would wonder what you had been doing to yourself. I'm afraid she would deny she was the elder. She goes in for being quite a smart young lady yet, I can tell you."

Mrs. Gibson shook her head ruefully. "She looks well, does she?" she said. "Ah, well, things are different with different people, and I think she took everything easier than I did, always."

"Marget," said her husband, in his grim, grave way, "hadn't you better tell the girl to be preparing some food."

His wife hastened to obey, in her tremulous, frightened manner. "Does the girl know anybody is here?" she asked. "I did not hear you knock."

"I think my uncle was looking out for us!" said Allan lightly: "he was watching at the gate. But I suppose the coming in of that train is the event of the day here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson; but though she hastened out of the room on her hospitable errand, George saw that her eyes, filled with tears from their first meeting, had at last overflowed.

George thought that the austere schoolmaster might probably offer some kindly apology for his wife's evident nervousness. But no. He ignored it altogether, and began to discuss some knotty ecclesiastical point that was evidently exercising the local mind. He kept up this style of conversation through the meal, which consisted of the simplest viands, plainly served on common stoneware. The table napery was full of darns, the silver worn to a mere wafer. Life at Sayoch was evidently lived out in grinding penury.

After they had finished their repast, a stroll through the village was proposed. There was little to be seen—a few sordid cottages, a commonplace farm, and one mysterious cairn; out of whose historical uncertainty, Mr. Gibson managed to make a great deal of talk. The uncle and nephew took the lead. George fell behind with Mrs. Gibson, who for the most part was silent. They returned home, by the barn-like church, standing in its dismal graveyard. But here,

Mrs. Gibson, stepping a little nearer to George, and speaking in a whisper, pointed to a heavy-slab of grey stone.

"That's my Lizzie's grave: our daughter's."

She looked up at him with her faded eyes as if she could not help craving for sympathy, even from a stranger. But there were no tears in them now.

"How sad! Your life would have been so much brighter if she had lived," said George, kindly.

The little woman shook her head slightly. "Perhaps it was best for her to go. I've never wished her back: but I have often wished myself with her. I know it's wrong. I wouldn't dare even say so to Mr. Gibson."

That little revelation of human pain and patience made George look with compassionate eyes on the bare home when they returned to it. It gave an undertone of pathos to the dreary "family worship," to which Mr. Gibson invited them with the grim words that he supposed "they would not mind joining in it for once." But even though the chapter chosen was from the Minor Prophets, though the prayer was little but a dry statement of doctrine, and though the psalm was read, and not sung, there was yet something in the whole scene which touched George Vivian's sensitive temperament.

He was early astir next morning. But Mrs. Gibson was up before him, seconding the domestic labours of her very rough "girl," who did not seem half so efficient as the barefooted, Gaelic-speaking handmaiden of Ragan. The breakfast table was set, the big Bible placed beside the "master's" cup. He had not yet appeared. And his wife went bustling in and out, tremulous, rueful and apologetic.

George turned about for something to interest him while he waited. There was the Bible; a large, leather-bound one; and he opened it.

The blank page at the beginning was headed simply by the names of Alexander Gibson and Margaret Burn. Then followed a date, presumably that of their marriage. Below came some ruled lines. On the first was written "Elizabeth Gibson, with the date of her birth. This name was repeated lower on the page, in fresher ink, with the date of her death, showing that she had passed way in her young womanhood.

But the singular thing was that between these two simple family entries, a space had been carefully and evenly cut out.

What could it mean? Could some mere clerical error, made perhaps in faltering grief, have caused such a complete excision?

Or—but George hastily closed the book. For a hand was on the door. It was the master of the house himself, speedily followed by the mistress, and presently by Allan.

Again, the solemn worship, again the plain, poor meal; but now to George's sense of the pathetic, was added that of the mysterious, the tragic. Was it something more than poverty, and sorrow and loneliness, which had graved the deep lines upon the elderly faces before him? And if there was a household story, did Allan Grale know it?

They had no time to lose. Their breakfast was hasty and their farewell brief. Mrs. Gibson sent many loving messages to her sister, and added some more for her brother-in-law and niece. And while she spoke with tremulous eagerness, she looked fervently into her nephew's face, as if there was something else she longed to say, but could not, and as if she hoped she might catch there some response to her unspoken longing. George thought Allan seemed glad to get away.

He gave a sigh of relief as they hurried down the road. "They are quite too awful," he said. "I knew they were queer, but I never thought they could be as bad as this."

"I am sure they were most kind and hospitable," affirmed George Vivian.

Could he tell Allan what he had chanced to see, and ask if it had any meaning? No. If it had any significance it must concern some private incident of family history.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK POOL.

A SWEET sunny English valley spreading far around—a belt of rich woodland—a smooth-shaven lawn in front of a rambling white house, against which two magnificent cedars stand out in bold relief.

This is the Court, Dering, where General and Mrs. Vivian live, which is the home of their niece, Maria, and the head-quarters of her two brothers, George and Edgar.

There is quite a circle in the drawing-room, for the Vivians have afternoon callers. The General stands in the centre of the hearth-rug. He is a little man, with hair which seems inclined to stand upright, a florid complexion, a fierce voice, and kind eyes. Mrs. Vivian is a large, fair woman, with a softly critical manner. "A gentle-spoken lady," the poor peasantry called her. Her nephew George had once said "that his uncle barked and his aunt bit."

"And so, Mrs. Grale, Mary Anne tells me you did not really enjoy Redbourne?" she was saying, sweetly, to her guest, a stout, short-breathed middle-aged lady in very thick silks and voluminous laces.

"No, indeed I did not," said Mrs. Grale, emphatically. For this was Allan's mother, truly little like her worn-out shabby sister in Savoch school-house! She and her daughter had just returned from a short visit to a lovely New Forest village, to which they had been attracted by sketches and accounts brought back by George Vivian, who had sojourned there previously. "As I said to Mary Anne, I did not see it was one bit prettier than Dering, and we might as well have stayed at home and never gone for a change at all. And a great deal better too; for pay what one may, one never gets a hired house like one's own place."

"No, no; always imposed upon!" interjected the General.

"I did not suppose Redbourne would be prettier than Dering," observed Mrs. Vivian. "But surely accommodation was to be had!"

"Oh the house we took was decent enough," admitted Mrs. Grale. "It was the village doctor's. You know the sort of thing in that style of dwelling: very little carpet on the bedroom floors and ——"

"Maria, may I send in my cup for a little more milk?" So spoke up the clear voice of a young lady at the other side of the room. Probably she thought it as well to remind Mrs. Grale that she and her sister were present—Lettice and Agnes Palmer. For their father was a doctor, the only doctor at Dering, and their house was exactly of the type Mrs. Grale was decrying.

Mrs. Vivian laughed softly. "My dear Mrs. Grale," she said, "can't you go in sometimes for plain living and high thinking—just for a little change. For my part, I'm always too delighted to get rid of all the sort of thing which one has had all one's life," she added, as if she herself were quite prepared to be a shepherdess.

"I'm sure the house was very nice, mamma," put in Mary Anne Grale; "and Redbourne was pretty enough. It was Mr. George Vivian's pictures which did all the mischief," she added with a smile. "He must have put all the poetry of his own nature into those sketches: and when we went to the places by ourselves, of course we did not find the poetry there!"

Miss Mary Anne Grale was a tall young person, very fashionable, with a small waist, tight gloves and a long train.

"And Redbourne really is dull," she went on, addressing herself to Edgar Vivian, in attendance at his sister's tea-table. "How on earth your brother endured it for the weeks upon weeks that he stayed there, I cannot imagine."

"Ah, but he has his sketching as a perpetual resource," said Edgar: "and then he comes across all sorts of quaint characters. George never lacks interest or amusement."

"It was odd that we did not hear of him at all," mused Mary Anne aloud. "I asked ever so many of the villagers whether they knew a Mr. Vivian, but they did not."

"It is not likely you would encounter the same sort of people. Or they might not understand your description," suggested Edgar. "You would call him Mr. Vivian, a gentleman, or perhaps an artist, while George's acquaintances there would probably know him as 'a painting chap.'"

"But I did come across plenty of people who knew about 'the painting chaps,' as I must own they did call them," laughed Mary Anne. "Still, none of them knew of a Mr. Vivian. They would ask me if I did not mean Mr. This or Mr. That: especially they were always asking if I was quite sure I did not mean a Mr. Forester, who seems to have been quite a favourite among them; and by the stories they told of his sayings and doings must be a great character

—a gentleman-amateur, I suppose, for he seemed by their accounts to have scattered his money about freely.”

“And did not even all these stories and incidents compensate for the absence of a pier and a promenade?” asked Agnes Palmer.

Agnes Palmer was a small slight girl, with soft waving hair, a well poised head, and rapid, bird-like movements. There was a dash of scorn in her voice as she spoke. Her elder sister Lettice gave her a glance, half of surprise, half of entreaty; Edgar Vivian turned towards her with a sunny smile. He was glad to hear her speak—she had been so silent all this afternoon. It was the first time he had seen her since he came down from College—and he and she had used to be such friends.

She did not look at him now. She looked straight past him at Mary Anne Grale, who returned the gaze with a sudden stony hardness settling on her handsome, smiling face.

“It is possible to have beautiful scenery and really interesting society together with all the amenities of holiday civilization,” said Mary Anne haughtily. “Of course they have to be sought for, and are not at everybody’s command. If one had only a choice between a crowded watering place and a dull village like Redbourne, I don’t know which one might choose.”

Maria Vivian came to the rescue. She felt there was jarring around her; a thing she always strove to put a stop to. She was not very pretty, but she had a sweet, interesting face. Some sadness seemed to have been upon her latterly, and she had grown pale and thin. “There are few of those wonderful places, which combine town and country,” she said, in her kind way.

“O, by the way!” exclaimed Mary Anne Grale, eagerly, “the only sensation we had at Redbourne was connected with an old country inn. It made me feel as if we were in the middle of a three volume novel! I dare say you have heard Mr. George speak of the old inn there, the Ash-Tree.”

“I think so,” said Maria. “I fancy George took a sketch of it.”

“It is more of a farm than an inn,” explained Miss Grale; “the old host takes quite a pride in his sheep and poultry. I think he keeps up his sign for a little rustic sociability, more than to invite custom. But I must tell you. It appears that this old host of the Ash-Tree, Joseph Raynham, had a pretty niece, and this pretty niece had been spoiled, and the clever young artists had turned her head, especially the artist who was talked of so much, Mr. Forester. It came to the uncle’s knowledge that they were sometimes seen roaming the forest together, and he spoke to his niece. She was not used to be found fault with, and she and the old man quarrelled more than once over it. Finally she ran away.”

“Ran away!” exclaimed Mrs. Vivian. “Do you mean ran away really? Did she not run back again?”

"She had not when we left Redbourne. She could not be traced, or heard of. The place was in a commotion over it."

"What was her name?" asked the General. "Had Mr. Forester run away also?"

"Oh, he had left weeks before—at least, I know it was some time before," replied Mary Anne. "I am not sure that he was suspected of being implicated. Her name, sir?—it was Rose Raynham."

Mrs. Grale was rising to depart. "I want to be at home by the time the train comes in," she explained. "It may, you know, General, bring the travellers."

They said adieu and went out to their carriage, and drove away to their home, Moorland House. Mrs. Grale could never become quite at ease behind the fiery steeds with which her husband kept her supplied. Her own pet ambition had been a pony chaise, and nothing more; but, like many ambitions, it had overtopped itself, and she had got more than she had bargained for!

The Miss Palmers did not linger. Edgar Vivian said he would walk part of the way with them. Lettice Palmer was pleased, and showed her pleasure. But his old friend, Agnes, was stubbornly indifferent. And as they went along, she left the conversation to Lettice.

"I'm afraid this return of mine to Dering will not be very merry," he said, in a low voice. "My uncle is terribly grieved that I have not done well at Oxford."

"Of course, he is," said Agnes, coldly. "Everybody is grieved."

"But misfortunes will befall the best of students," put in good-natured Lettice.

"I know I have not been at my best," said Edgar, frankly. "I did very little good work last term. It is not always altogether our own fault. The affairs of our friends sometimes—" he hesitated. His defence of himself was drawing him farther than he had intended.

"Our friends," repeated Agnes Palmer. "'Friend' is a very sacred word with some people; but with others it——"

She stopped abruptly, and Edgar Vivian winced. And the two did not speak again for the rest of the walk.

"I will not go in with you now," he said when they reached Dr. Palmer's. "I think I shall stroll to the railway station, on the chance that that wandering brother of mine and Grale may turn up."

Wishing them good evening, Edgar Vivian made his way to the dull little railway station. The train from London was nearly due, but no Dering people seemed to be awaiting it. One or two working men were there, and a woman of rather superior class.

Edgar's attention was particularly drawn to that woman. He could not tell why; unless it was that her cloak attracted him. It was a long dust mantle of a bright, deep, glaring yellow colour. She herself was of middle height and approaching middle age. Her complexion was dark, tawny; and her regular features were well-marked and

indicative of decision, energy, and perhaps of something rarer than either—determination. Indeed, this characteristic struck Edgar, who was not a particularly acute observer, and he thought it seemed as if she had some magnetic power to draw his gaze upon her.

Edgar Vivian did not really expect the travellers; therefore, when the train rushed in and he saw them leaning from a carriage window, it was in a way a surprise. Eagerly he rushed forward to greet them.

"All well, I suppose," cried Allan, alighting. "Then here, Vivian, you and I will say good-bye," he added, speaking to George. "The porters will divide our luggage, and send it home after us."

Had the young men looked back in leaving the station, they would have seen that slight, yellow-cloaked woman come out of the waiting-room, go up to their luggage, and take a swift survey of the tickets adhering thereto. These afforded no bad chart of the journeying just completed by two of them. Surely she did not find what she had expected! For she stood, disappointed and irresolute. "I must go straight back again!" she then said, and hurried out of the station.

But somebody had been watching her. This was a young railway porter; and he followed her to the railing, and looked after her, as she went off swiftly down the road, without one backward glance.

"What were you looking after?" asked a fellow workman.

"At that yellow woman, who has been hanging about here this evening," he answered. "I can't make her out. There's that about her that makes one feel something is up somewhere."

Meanwhile Allan reached home. A strange gloom had fallen on him during his short walk from the station to his father's house. Perhaps it might be but that sense of blank which we have all experienced on parting from one with whom we have lived in close companionship for many days. Perhaps it was the dropping off of the careless holiday self and the resumption of ordinary cares and anxieties. But could these be very heavy for such as Allan Grale?

He found his mother and Mary Anne just sitting down to dinner. His father was not there: no uncommon occurrence, but to-day it seemed to fret Mrs. Grale, because she thought it might mean more trouble at the counting-house—there had been a good deal of trouble lately, she told her son. Of course, she did not know what about—Mr. Grale never told her such things, as Allan knew—but she fancied some dishonesty had been discovered, to which no clue could be obtained. Anyway, it was disturbing his father.

Mary Anne kept interrupting her mother with inquiries concerning George Vivian, his sayings and his doings.

When dinner was over, Allan expressed his intention of taking a little stroll, and went out. His legs wanted a stretch after the cramped railway journey, he carelessly remarked to his mother and sister.

He walked away swiftly, striking off by unfrequented ways towards a wild and lonely spot, which, as a rule, Dering did not favour. In fact Dering shunned it, especially at this the dusk hour. The place

had one dark legend attaching to it; all the darker because its facts were lost in the mists of centuries, and fancy was left to supply their place. But, however the legend might vary—it was always a story of violent death and undying remorse. And the scene was ever the Black Pool.

Some people—Allan Grale had been among them—did not believe in the legend at all. They thought that the loneliness and weirdness of the Black Pool itself had put the story into some old romancer's head, and thence it had been handed down.

Truly, the Black Pool was an eerie spot! And it could never have looked more weird than it did on this the evening of Allan's return to Dering. The rich autumn moonlight, so bright and yellow that it seemed like sunshine bewitched of its genial warmth, lay on the deep, dark water which so well deserved the name it bore—the Black Pool. Around it the turf rose gently, thickly dotted with clusters of bracken and clumps of bramble, and a little farther back, completely encircling it, stood rows of giant trees, their trunks grey with the moss of ages. They stood around, gazing down upon the Black Pool, like relentless spectators in an amphitheatre. If the Black Pool had a story, they knew it. If it had a secret, they kept it. Only one among them, wrenched by some sudden storm, stretched skyward a black and blasted bough.

Allan Grale was not sensitive to external influences. He came here because he wanted to be alone. The Black Pool and its horrors had not much horror for him. They had never haunted yet his dreams, waking or sleeping.

Had he ever any waking dreams? And were they ever haunted? What was it that rose before his mind's eye now, so that he did not notice the moonlight on the solemn water, or the black shadow cast by the withered branch?

What filled his thoughts was a scene far different from this gloomy dell—a fair garden scene, in the light of a beautiful evening, early in the summer which is now on the wane. He sees himself standing apart, talking with a fair, graceful girl, who raises her soft eyes to his, as women do to only one. O, he can still hear her voice as it lingered shyly over his name. It is now three or four months since he has heard that voice in its soft accent, but it is ever ringing in his ears.

"Allan—dearest Allan!" He can see her before his eyes—down to every detail of the dress she wore, the clinging black silk with the soft white laces, and the little pearl cross nestling on the ivy leaves upon her bosom. A man does not forget the veriest trifle of the day when the woman he loves promises to be his. For it was on that ever-to-be-remembered summer evening, when the leaves which are now turning golden, had still all the freshness of spring, that Maria Vivian had finally avowed she loved Allan Grale, even as he loved her, and promised to be his wife.

Yet from that evening—that fatal evening as he called it in his thoughts—the two had never met so as to exchange another word!

And yet they had parted then as lovers part. Maria had gone hastily back to the Court with such a glow on her cheek as no summer breeze can give. And she had carried with her a letter which she had persisted in claiming from Allan, seeing that he had told her he had written it for her, in case he found no opportunity for speech with her.

“Give it to me,” Maria had said in her frank maidenly surrender. “It shall be my dearest treasure. I cannot bear to lose a single sentence that you wrote and meant for me.”

Yes: those were her words: he remembered them, every one. They rose upon his heart now, and smote it so sharply that he sat down on the ground under that blasted tree, and groaned aloud in the solitude.

They had parted thus, he leaving the letter of love behind him. And yet they had never met again: not even by chance—not at church, or on the high road. Chance meetings are not for those who do not part by chance!

He knew what had parted them. And so did she. Nobody else did. Indeed, nobody else dreamed that they had once drawn quite so near, or that they were so far apart now. He could trust her to keep the secret as safely as the grave. But to-night, he had begun to ask himself a question: “If it comes out otherwise, what then?”

“If it comes out!”—He looked up with bewildered eyes and swimming brain. And the moonlight played on the still waters of the Black Pool. Those waters were deep. They might keep a secret too!

Yet somehow the knowledge that Maria Vivian knew the worst already, seemed to hold Allan Grale back from despair. It was as if one in the Gulf of Doom felt an angel watching him, and understood that where those pure eyes could penetrate a way out must still exist.

There was a sudden cry above his head. Allan started up. It was but a belated bird hying to its rest. But it had broken the spell. The young man turned from the solemn regions of remembrance and remorse, back to the chances of fortune and the “what-will-be, will-be,” mood of his ordinary life. So, as he hastened homeward, he had his jest ready for the solitary villager he met; and when, entering the drawing-room at home, his mother asked “Where did you take your stroll,” he answered, carelessly enough, “Only as far as the Black Pool.”

Mrs. Grale shivered. “The Black Pool!” she echoed. “I cannot endure that place; and at this time of night!—to me, it seems cold even in the sunshine. I believe, Allan, it bears the chill of an evil deed.”

Did she speak in the light of a prophecy?

(To be continued.)

CARAMEL COTTAGE.

THE BARRISTER'S VISIT.

IT was early in August, and we were at Dyke Manor, for the Squire had let us go home from school for the Worcester races. We had joined him at Worcester the previous day, Tuesday, driving home with him in the evening. To-morrow, Thursday, he would drive us over to the course again; to-day, Wednesday, the horses would have rest; and on Friday we must return to school.

Breakfast was over, the Squire gone out, and the few minutes' Bible-reading to us—which Mrs. Todhetley never forgot, though Tod did not always stay in for it, but he did this morning—came to an end. Hannah appeared at the door as she closed the book.

"Miss Barbary's come," ma'am," she said.

"Run, my dear," cried Mrs. Todhetley to Lena.

"I don't want to," said Lena, running to the open window instead, and nearly pitching herself head-foremost through it: upon which Hannah captured her and carried her off.

"Who on earth is Miss Barbary?" questioned Tod. "Any relation to the man at Caramel Cottage?"

"His daughter," said Mrs. Todhetley. "She comes to teach Lena French."

"Hope she's less of a shady character than her father!" was Tod's free comment.

A year or two before this, a stranger had made his appearance at Church Dykely, and put up at the Silver Bear. He was a gentlemanly-looking man of perhaps forty years, tall, slender, agile, with thin, distinguished features, an olive skin, black hair, and eyes of a peculiar shade of deep, steel-blue. People went into raptures over his face, and called it beautiful. And so it was; but to my thinking it had a look in it that was the opposite of beautiful; any way, the opposite of good. They said it was my fancy at home: but Duffham owned to the same fancy. His name, as he wrote it down one day at the Silver Bear, was Pointz Barbary. After a week's stay at the inn, he, finding, I suppose, that the neighbourhood suited him, looked out for a little place to settle down upon, and met with it in Caramel Cottage, a small dwelling near to us, on the property called Caramel's Farm. The cottage was then to be let, and Mr. Barbary went into it.

Some items of his past history came out by degrees; it is hard to say how, for he told none himself. Now and then some former friend or other came to pay him a short visit; and it may be that these strangers talked about him.

Pointz Barbary, a gentleman by descent, and once of fairly good substance, had been a great traveller, had roved pretty nearly all over

the world. The very few relatives he possessed lived in Canada—people of condition, it was said—and his own property (what was left of it) was also there. He had been married twice. First to a young lady in France; her friends (English) having settled there for economy's sake. She died at the end of the year, leaving him a little girl, that the mother's people at once took to. Next he married a Miss Reste, daughter of Colonel Reste, who was in Her Majesty's service. A few years later she also died—died of consumption—leaving him a widower and childless. It's true he had his first wife's daughter, but she lived in France with her mother's sister, so he did not get much benefit from her.

Mr. Barbary was poor. No mistake about that. The interest of his first wife's money brought him in fifty-two pounds yearly, and this he would enjoy till his death, when it went to his daughter. Miss Reste had brought him several thousand pounds; but he and she had lived away, and not a stiver remained of it. His own means had also been spent lavishly; and, so far as was known, he had but the two-and-fifty pounds a-year to live upon at Caramel Cottage, with a chance remittance from Canada now and again.

He made no acquaintance at Church Dykely, and none was made with him. Civilly courteous in a rather grand and haughty way when he met people, so far as a few remarks went, touching the weather or the crops, and similar safe topics, he yet kept the world at a distance. As the time went on it was thought there might be a reason for this. Whispers began to circulate that Mr. Barbary's doings were not orthodox. He was suspected of poaching, both in game and fish, and a strong feeling of shyness grew up against him.

Some few months prior to the present time—August—his daughter came to Caramel Cottage. Her aunt in France was dead, and she had no home henceforth but her father's. That I and Tod had not seen or heard of her until now, was owing to the midsummer holidays having been spent at Crabb Cot. The vacation over, and Mrs. Todhetley back at Dyke Manor, she found herself called upon by Miss Barbary. Hearing that Mrs. Todhetley wished her little girl to begin French, she had come to offer herself as teacher. The upshot was that she was engaged, and came for a couple of hours every morning to drill French into Lena.

"What's she like?" asked Tod of the mother, upon her explaining this. "Long and thin and dark, like Barbary, and disagreeable with a self-contained reticence?"

"She is not the least like him in any way," was Mrs. Todhetley's answer. "She is charmingly simple—good, I am sure, and one of the most open-natured girls I ever met. 'I wish to do it for the sake of earning a little money,' she said to me, when asking to come. 'My dear father is not rich, and if I can help him in ever so small a way I shall be thankful.' The tears almost came into her eyes as she spoke," added Mrs. Todhetley; "she quite won my heart."

"She seems to think great things of that respectable parent of hers!" commented Tod.

"Oh, yes. Whatever may be the truth as to his failings, *she* sees none in him. And, my dears, better that it should be so. She earns a little money of me, apart from teaching Lena," added Mrs. Todhetley.

"What at?" asked Tod. "Teaching *you*?"

The mother shook her head with a smile. "I found out, Joseph, that she is particularly skilful at mending old lace. I have some that needs repair. She takes it home and does it at her leisure—and you cannot imagine how grateful she is."

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen—close upon twenty, I think she said," replied the mother. And there the conversation ended, for Mrs. Todhetley had to go to the kitchen to give the daily orders.

The morning wore on. We went to Church Dykely and were back again by twelve o'clock. Tod had got Don on the lawn, making him jump for biscuit, when the dog rushed off, barking, and we heard a scream. A young lady in a straw hat and a half-mourning cotton dress was running away from him, she and Lena having come out of the house together.

"Come here, Don," said Tod in his voice of authority, which the good Newfoundland dog never disobeyed. "How dare you, sir? Johnny, lad, I suppose that's Miss Barbary."

I had forgotten all about her. A charming girl, as the mother had said, slight and graceful, with a face like a peach blossom, dimpled cheeks, soft light-brown hair and dark-blue eyes. Not the hard, steel-blue eyes that her father had; sweet eyes, these, with a gentle, loving look in them.

"You need not be afraid of the dog," cried Tod, advancing to where she stood, behind the Mulberry tree. "Miss Barbary, I believe?"—lifting his cap.

"Yes," she said in a frank tone, turning her frank face to him; "I am Katrine Barbary. It is a very large dog—and he barks at me."

Large he was, bigger than many a small donkey. A brave, faithful, good-tempered dog, he, and very handsome, his curly white coat marked out with black. Gentle to friends and to respectable strangers, Don was at mortal enmity with tramps and beggars: we could not cure him of this, so he was chained up by day. At night he was unchained to roam the yard at will, but the gate was kept locked. Had he got out, he might have pinned the coat of any loose man he met, but I don't believe he would have bitten him. A good fright Don would give, but not mortal injury. At least, we had never yet known him do that.

Lena ran up in her short pink frock, her light curls flying. "Miss Barbary is always afraid when she hears Don bark," she said to us. "She will not go near the yard; she thinks he'll bite her."

"I will teach you how to make friends with him," said Tod: "though he would never hurt you, Miss Barbary. Come here and pat his head while I hold him; call him by his name gently, 'Don; poor Don; good Don.' Once he knows you, he would protect you from harm with his life."

She complied with ready obedience, though the roses left her cheeks. "There," said Tod, loosing the dog, and letting her pat him at leisure, "see how gentle he is; how affectionately he looks up at you!"

"Please not to think me very silly!" she pleaded earnestly, as if beseeching pardon for a sin. "I have never been used to dogs. We do not keep dogs in France. At least very few people do. Oh, dear!"

Something that she carried in her left hand wrapped in paper had dropped on the lawn. Don pounced upon it. "Oh, please take it from him! please, please!" she cried out in terror. Tod laughed, and extricated the little parcel.

"It has some valuable old lace in it of Mrs. Todhetley's," she explained as she thanked him. "I am taking it home to mend."

"You mend old lace famously, I hear," said Tod, as we walked with her to the entrance gate.

"Yes, I think I do it nearly as well as the nuns who taught me."

"Have you been in a convent?"

"Only for my education. I was an externe—a daily pupil. My aunt lived next door to it. I went every morning at eight o'clock and returned home at six in the evening to supper."

"Did you get no dinner?" asked Tod.

She took the question literally. "I had dinner and collation at school; breakfast and supper at home. That was the way in our town with the externes at the convent. We were Protestants, you see, so my aunt liked me to be at home on Sundays. Thank you for teaching Don to know me: and now I will say good morning to you."

I was holding the gate open for her to pass out, when Ben Gibbon went by, a gun carelessly held over his shoulder. He touched his hat to us, and we gave him a slight nod in reply. Miss Barbary said "Good day, Mr. Gibbon."

Tod drew down his displeased lips. He had already taken a liking to the girl—so had I, for that matter—she was a true lady, and Mr. Ben Gibbon, a brother to the gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, could not boast of a particularly shining character.

"Do you know *him*, Miss Barbary?" asked Tod. "Be quiet, Don!" he cried to the dog, which had begun to growl when he saw Gibbon.

"He comes to our house sometimes to see papa. Please pardon me for keeping you waiting," she added to me, as I still held back the gate. "That gun is pointed this way and it may go off."

Tod was amused. "You seem to dread guns as much as you dread dogs, Miss Barbary. I will walk home with you," he said, as she at last came through, the gun having got to a safe distance.

"Oh, but ——" she was beginning, and then stopped in confusion, blushing hotly, and looking at both of us. "I should like it; but —— would it be proper?"

"Proper!" echoed Tod, staring, and then bursting into a fit of laughter long and loud. "Oh, dear! why, Miss Barbary, you must be French all over! Johnny, you can come, too. Lena, run back again; you have not any hat on."

Crossing the road to take the near field way, we went along the path that led beside the hedge, and soon came in view of Caramel Cottage; it was only a stone's throw, so to say, from our house. An uncommonly lonely look it had, buried there amid many trees, with the denser trees of the Grove close beyond it. We asked her whether she did not find it dull here.

"At first I did, very; I do still a little: it is so different from the lively town I have lived in, where we knew all the people, and they knew us. But we shall soon be more lively," she resumed, after a pause. "A cousin is coming to stay with us."

"Indeed," said Tod. "Is it a lady or a gentleman?"

"Oh, it is a gentleman—Edgar Reste. He is not my cousin by kin; not really related to me; but papa says he will be as my cousin, as my brother even, and that he is very nice. Papa's last wife was Miss Reste, and he is her nephew. He is a barrister in London, and he has been much overworked, and he is coming here to-morrow for rest and country air."

Within the low green gate of the little front garden of Caramel Cottage stood Mr. Barbary, in his brown velvet shooting coat and breeches of the same, that became him and his straight lithe limbs so well. Every time I saw him the beauty of his face struck me afresh; but so did the shifty expression of his eyes.

"There's papa!" exclaimed the girl, her dimples lighting up. "And—why there's a gentleman with him—a stranger! I wonder who it is?"

I saw him as he came from the porch down the narrow garden-path. A slight, slender young man of middle height and distinguished air, with a pale, worn, nice-looking face, and laughing, luminous, dark brown eyes. Yes, I saw Edgar Reste for the first time at this his entrance at Caramel Cottage, and it was a thing to be thankful for that I could not then foresee the nameless horror his departure from it (I may as well say his disappearance) was to shadow forth.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Barbary to us, courteously civil. "Katrine, here's a surprise for you: your cousin is come." Edgar, this is my little girl.—Mr. Reste," he added, by way of introduction generally.

Mr. Reste lifted his hat, bowed slightly, and then turned to

Katrine with outstretched hand. She met it with a hot blush, as if strange young men did not shake hands with her every day.

"We did not expect you quite so soon," she gently said, to atone for her first surprise.

"True," he answered. "But I felt unusually out of sorts yesterday, and I thought it would make no difference to Mr. Barbary whether I came to-day or to-morrow."

His voice had a musical ring; his manner was open and honest. He might be Pointz Barbary's nephew by marriage, but I am sure he was not by nature.

"They'll fall in love with one another, those two; you'll see," said Tod to me as we went home. "Did you mark his pleased face when he spoke to her, Johnny—and how she blushed?"

"O, come now, Tod! they tell me I am fanciful. What are you?"

"Not fanciful with your fancies, lad. As to you, Mr. Don"—turning to the dog, which had done nothing but growl while we stood before Barbary's gate, "unless you mend your manners, you shall not come out again. What ails you, sir, to-day?"

II.

If love springs out of companionship, why then, little wonder that it found its way into Caramel Cottage. They were with each other pretty nearly all day and every day, that young man and that young woman; and so—what else was to be expected?

"We must try and get you strong again," said Mr. Barbary to his guest, who at first, amid other adverse symptoms, could eat nothing. No matter what dainty little dish old Joan prepared, Mr. Reste turned from it.

Mr. Barbary had taken to old Joan with the house. A little, dark, active woman, she, with bright eyes and a mob-cap of muslin. She was sixty years old; quick, capable, simple, and kindly. We don't get many such servants now-a-days. One defect Joan had—deafness. When a voice was close to her, it was all right; at a distance she could not hear it at all.

"How long is it that you have been ailing, cousin Edgar," asked Miss Barbary, one day when they were sitting together.

"O, some few weeks, cousin Katrine," he answered in a tone to imitate hers—and then laughed. "Look here, child, don't call me 'cousin Edgar!' For pity's sake, don't!"

"I know you are not my true cousin," she said, blushing furiously.

"It's not for that. If we were the nearest cousins that can be, it would still be silly." Objectionable, was the word he had all but used. "It is bad taste; has not a nice sound to cultivated ears. I am Edgar, if you please; and you are Katrine."

"In France we say 'mon cousin,' or 'ma cousine,' when speaking to one," returned Katrine.

"But we are not French ; we are English."

"Well," she resumed, as her face cooled down—"why did you not take rest before? and what is it that has made you ill?"

He shook his head thoughtfully. The parlour window, looking to the front, was thrown up before them. A light breeze tempered the summer heat, wafting in sweetness from the homely flowers and scented shrubs. The little garden was crowded with them, as all homely gardens were then. Roses, lilies, columbines, stocks, gillyflowers, sweet peas, sweet Williams, pinks white and red, tulips, pansies (or as they were then very generally called, garden-gates), mignonette, bachelor's buttons, and lots of others, sweet or not sweet, that I can't stay to recall : and clusters of marjoram and lavender and "old-man" and sweet-briar, and jessamines white and yellow, and woodbine, and sweet syringa ; and the tall hollyhock, and ever true but gaudy sunflower—each and all flourished there in their respective seasons. Amidst the grand "horticulture," as it is phrased, of these modern days, it is a pleasure to lose oneself in the memories of these dear old simple gardens. Sometimes I get wondering if we shall ever meet them again—say in Heaven.

They sat there at the open window enjoying the fragrance. Katrine had made a paper fan, and was gently fluttering it to and fro before her flushed young face.

"I have burnt the candle at both ends," continued Mr. Reste. "That is what's the matter with me."

"Y—es," hesitated she, not quite understanding.

"At my law business all day, and at my literary work the best part of the night, year in and year out—it has told upon me, Katrine."

"But why should you do both?" asked Katrine.

"Why? Oh, because—because my pocket is a shallow pocket, and has, moreover, a hole in it."

She laughed.

"Not getting briefs showered in upon me as one might hope my merits deserve—I know not any young barrister who does—I had to supplement my earnings in that line by something else, and I took to writing. *That* is up-hill work, too ; but it brings in a few shillings now and again. One must pay one's way, you know, Katrine, if possible ; and with some of us it is apt to be a rather extravagant way."

"Is it with you?" she asked, earnestly.

"It *was*. I squandered money too freely at first. My old uncle gave me a fair sum to set up with when my dinners were eaten and I was called ; and I suppose I thought the sum would never come to an end. Ah, me ! we buy our experience dearly."

"Will not the old uncle give you more?"

"Not a stiver—this long while past. He lives in India, and writing to ask him does no good. And he is the only relative left to me in the world."

"Except papa."

Edgar Reste lifted his eyebrows. "Your papa is not my relative, young lady. His late wife was my aunt; my father's sister."

"Did your father leave you no money, when he died?"

"Not any. He was a clergyman with a good benefice, but he lived up to his income and did not save. No, I have only myself to lean on. Don't know whether it will turn out to be a broken reed."

"If I could only help you!" breathed Katrine.

"You are helping me more than I can express," he answered, impulsively. "When with you I get a feeling of rest—of peace. And that's what I want."

Which avowal brought a hot blush again to Miss Katrine's cheek and a curious thrill somewhere round about her heart.

Time went on. Before much of it had elapsed, they were in love with one another for ever and for ever, with that first love that comes but once in a lifetime. That is, in secret; it was not betrayed or spoken of by either of them, or intended to be. Mr. Reste, Barrister-at-law (and briefless), could as soon have entertained thoughts of setting up a coach-and-four, as of setting up a wife. He had not a ghost of the means necessary at present, he saw not the smallest chance yet of attaining them. Years and years and years might go by before that desirable pinnacle in the social race was reached; and it might never be reached at all. It would be the height of dishonour, as he considered, to persuade Katrine Barbary into an engagement, which might never be fulfilled. How could he condemn her to wear out her heart and her life and her days in loneliness, sighing for him, never seeing him—he at one end of the world, she at the other? for that's how, lover-like, he estimated the distance between this and the metropolis. So he never let a word of his love escape him, and he guarded his looks, and treated Katrine as his little cousin.

And she? Be you sure, she was as reticent as he. An inexperienced young maiden, scrupulously and modestly brought up, she kept her secret zealously. It is true she could not help her blushes, or the tell-tale thrilling of her soft voice; but Edgar Reste was not obliged to read them correctly.

Likely enough he could penetrate, as the weeks wore on, some of the ins and outs in the private worth of Mr. Barbary. In fact, he *did* do so. He found that gentleman rather addicted to going abroad at night when reasonable people were in bed and asleep. Mr. Barbary gave him his views upon the subject. Poaching, he maintained, was a perfectly legitimate and laudable occupation. "It's one to be proud of, instead of the contrary," he asserted, one September day, when they were in the gun-room together. "*Proud of*, Edgar."

"For a gentleman?" laughed Mr. Reste, who invariably made light of the subject. And he glanced at his host curiously from between his long dark eyelashes and straight, fine eyebrows; at the dark,

passive, handsome face, at the long slender fingers, busy over the lock of his favourite gun.

"For a gentleman, certainly. Why should common men usurp all its benefit? The game laws are obnoxious laws, and it behoves us to set them at naught."

Another amused laugh from Mr. Reste.

"Who hesitates to do a bit of smuggling?" argued the speaker. "Answer me that, Reste. Nobody. Nobody, from a prince to a peasant, from poor Jack Tar to his superfine commander, but deems it meritorious to cheat the Customs. When a man lands here or yonder with a few contraband things about him, and gets them through safely, do his friends and acquaintances turn the cold shoulder upon him? Not a bit of it; they regard it as a fine feather in his cap."

"O, no doubt."

"Poaching is the same thing. It is also an amusement. O, it is grand fun, Edgar Reste, to be out on a fine night and dodge the keepers!" continued Mr. Barbary, with enthusiasm. "The spice of daring in it, of danger, if you choose to put it that way, stimulates the nerves like wine."

"Not quite orthodox, though, mon ami."

"Orthodox be hanged. Stolen pleasures are sweetest, as we all know. You shall go out with me some night, Edgar, and judge for yourself."

"Don't say but I will—just to look on—if you'll ensure my getting back in safety," said the barrister, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, assent or refusal.

"Back in safety!" came the mocking echo, as if to get back in safety from midnight poaching were a thing as sure as the sun. "We'll let a week or two go on; when shooting first comes in, the keepers are safe to be on the alert; and then I'll choose a night for you."

"All right. I suppose Katrine knows nothing of this?"

Mr. Barbary lodged his gun in the corner against the wainscot, and turned to look at the barrister. "Katrine!" he repeated, in surprised reproach. "Why, *no*. And take care that you don't tell her."

Mr. Reste nodded.

"She is the most unsuspecting, innocent child in regard to the ways of the naughty world that I've ever met with," resumed Barbary. "I don't think she as much as knows what poaching means."

"I wonder you should have her here," remarked the younger man, reflectively.

"How can I help it? There's nowhere else for her to be. She is too old to be put to school; and if she were not, I have not the means to pay for her. It does not signify; she will never suspect anything," concluded Mr. Barbary.

Please do not think Caramel Cottage grand enough to possess a regular "gun-room." Mr. Barbary called it so, because he kept his two guns in it, also his fishing-tackle and things of that sort. Entering

at the outer porch and over the level door-sill, to the narrow house passage, the parlour lay on the left, and was of pretty good size. The gun-room lay on the right; a little square room with bare boards, unfurnished, save for a deal table, a chair or two, and a strong cupboard let into the wall, which the master of the house kept locked. Behind this room was the kitchen, which opened into the back yard. This yard, on the kitchen side, was bounded by dwarf wooden palings, having a low gate in their midst. Standing at the gate and looking sideways, you could see the chimnies of Dyke Manor. On the opposite side, the yard was enclosed by various small out-buildings and adjuncts belonging to a cottage homestead. A rain-water barrel stood in the corner by the house; an open shed next, in which knives were cleaned and garden tools kept; then came the pump; and lastly, a little room called the brewhouse, used for washing and brewing, and for cooking also during the worst heat of summer. A furnace was built beside the grate, and its floor was paved with square red bricks. Beyond this yard, quite open to it, lay a long garden, well filled with vegetables and fruit trees, and enclosed by a high hedge. Upstairs were three bed chambers. Mr. Barbary occupied the largest and best, which was over the parlour; the smaller one over the gun-room had been assigned to Edgar Reste, both of them looking front; while Katrine's room was above the kitchen, looking to the yard and the garden. Old Joan slept in a lean-to loft in the roof. There is a reason for explaining all this.

III.

He had looked like a ghost when we went to school after the races; he looked like a hale, hearty man when we got home from the holidays at Michaelmas and to eat the goose. Of course he had had pretty near eight weeks' spell of idleness and country air at Caramel Cottage. To say the truth, we felt surprised at his being there still.

"Well, it *is* longer than I meant to stay," Mr. Reste admitted, when Tod said something of this. "The air has done wonders for me."

"Why longer? The law courts do not open yet."

"I had thoughts of going abroad. However, that can stay for next year."

"Have you had any shooting?"

"No. I do not possess a licence."

It was on the tip of Tod's tongue, as I could well see, to ask why he did not take out a licence, but he checked it. This little colloquy was held at the Manor gate on Saturday, the day after our return. Miss Barbary was leaving Lena at the usual time, and he had come strolling across the field to meet her. They went away together.

"What did I tell you, Johnny?" said Tod, turning to me, as soon as they were out of hearing. "It is a regular case of over-head-and-ears: cut, and dried, and pickled."

"I don't see what you judge by, Tod."

"*Don't you!* You'll be a muff to the end, lad. Fancy a fine young fellow like Reste, a man of the world, staying on at that pokey little place of Barbary's unless he had some strong motive to keep him there! I dare say he pays Barbary well for the accommodation."

"I dare say Barbary could not afford to entertain him unless he did."

"He stops there to make love to her. It must be a poor look-out, though, for Katrine, pretty little dimpled girl! As much chance of a wedding, I should say, as of a blue moon."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Want of funds. I'd start for London, if I were you, Johnny, and set the Thames on fire. A man must be uncommonly hard up when he lets all the birds go beside him for want of taking out a licence."

They were walking onwards, slowly, Mr. Reste bending to talk to her. And of course it will be understood that a good deal of that which I have said, and am about to say, is only related from what came to my knowledge later on.

"Is it true that you had meant to go abroad this year?" Katrine was asking him.

"Yes, I once thought of it," he answered. "I have friends living at Dieppe, and they wanted me to go to them. But I have stayed on here instead. Another week of it, ten days perhaps, and then I must leave Worcestershire and you, Katrine."

"But why?"

"Why, to work, my dear little girl. That is getting in arrears shamefully. We are told that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; but all play and no work would have worse results for Jack than dullness. Ah, Katrine, what a world this might be if we could only do as we like in it!"

"When shall you come again?"

"Perhaps never," he answered, incautiously.

"Never!" she repeated, her face turning white before she could hide it from him. It was a great shock.

"Katrine, my dear," he said with some emotion, his tone low and earnest, "I could stay at Caramel Cottage for my whole life and never wish to quit it, unless I carried somebody else away from it with me. But there are things which a poor man, a man without money in the present or prospect of it in the future, may not as much as glance at: he must put the temptation from him and hold it at arm's length. I had a dream the other night," he added, after a pause: "I thought I was a Q.C. and stood in my silk, haranguing a full bench of judges at Westminster—who listened to me with attentive suavity. When I awoke I burst out laughing."

"At the contrast it presented to reality?" she breathed.

"Just at that. If I were but making enough to set up a snug

little nest of a home, though ever so small, it would be—something: but I am not. And so, Katrine, you see that many things I would do I cannot do; cannot even think of. And there it lies, and there it ends."

"Yes, I see, Edgar," she answered, softly sighing.

"Shall you miss me when I am gone?"

Some queer feeling took her throat; she could not speak. Mr. Reste stooped to pick a little pale blue-bell that grew under the hedge.

"I do not know how I shall bear with the loneliness then," she said in answer, seemingly more to herself than to him, or to the blue sky right before her, on which her eyes were fixed. "And I shall be more afraid when you are no longer in the house."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, turning to her in blank surprise. "What are you afraid of, Katrine?"

"It—it is all so solitary for me. . . . Old Joan is too deaf to be talked to much; and papa is either at work in the garden or shut up in the gun-room, busy with his things. Please don't laugh at my childishness!"

She had made a pause, as put just to get over her embarrassment, the avowal having slipped from her unwittingly. The fact was, poor Katrine Barbary had been rudely awakened from her state of innocent security. Some days back, when in the cottage hut of Mary Standish, for Katrine liked to go about and make friends with the people, that ill-doing husband of Mary's, Jim, chanced to be at home. Jim had just been had up before the magistrates at Alcester on some suspicion connected with snares and gins, but there was no certain proof forthcoming, and he had to be discharged. Katrine remarked that if she were Jim she should leave off poaching, which must be a very dreadful thing, and frightfully hazardous. Mr. Jim replied that it was not a dreadful thing, nor hazardous either, for them that knew what they were about, and he referred her to her father for confirmation of this assertion. One word led to another. Jim Standish, his ideas loose and lawless, never thought to hurt the young lady by what he disclosed, for he was kind enough when he had no motive to be the contrary, but when Katrine left the hut, she carried with her the terrible knowledge that her father was as fond of poaching as the worst of them. Since then she had lived in a state of chronic terror.

"Yes, it must be very solitary for you," assented Mr. Reste in a grave tone, and he had no idea that her answer was an evasive one, or its lightness put on; "but I cannot help you, Katrine. Should you ever need counsel, or—or protection in any way, apply for it to your friends at Dyke Manor. They seem kind, good people, and would be strong to aid."

Turning in at the little side gate as he spoke, they saw Mr. Barbary at work in the garden. He was digging up a plot of ground some seven or eight feet square under the branches of the summer-apple

tree, which grew at this upper end of the garden, nearly close to the yard.

"What is he going to plant there, I wonder?" listlessly spoke Mr. Reste, glancing at the freshness of the turned-up mould.

"Winter cabbages, perhaps; but I am sure I don't know," returned Katrine. "I do not understand the seasons for planting vegetables as papa does."

This, as I have just said, was on Saturday. We saw Mr. Reste and Katrine at church the next day: a place Barbary did not often trouble with his presence; and walked with them, on coming out, as far as the two ways lay. Our people liked the look of Edgar Reste, but had not put themselves forward to make much acquaintance with him, on account of Barbary. One Tuesday, when the squire was driving to Alcester, he had overtaken Mr. Reste walking thither to have a look at the market, and he invited him to a seat in the carriage. They drove in and drove back together, and had between the times a snack of bread-and-cheese at the Angel. The Squire took quite a fancy to the young barrister, and openly said to him he wished he was staying anywhere but at Caramel Cottage.

"You are thinking of leaving soon, I hear," said the Squire to him, as we halted in a group when parting, on this same walk from church.

"In about a week," replied Mr. Reste. "I may go on Saturday next; certainly not later than the following Monday."

"Shall you like a drive to Evesham between this and then?" went on the Squire. "I am going over there one of these days."

"I shall like it very much indeed."

"Then I will let you know which day I go. Good bye."

"Good bye," answered Mr. Reste, lifting his hat in salute to us all, as he walked on with Katrine.

Am I lingering over these various trifling details? I suppose it will seem so. But the truth is, a dreadful part of the story is coming on (as poor Katrine said of the poaching) and my pen holds back from approaching it.

A day or two had gone on. It was Tuesday morning, warm and bright with sunshine. Katrine sat in the parlour at Caramel Cottage, pouring out the coffee at the breakfast table.

"Will you take some ham, Katrine?"

"No thank you, papa; I am not hungry."

"Not hungry! nonsense!" and Mr. Barbary put a slice of ham on her plate. "Do you feel inclined for a walk as far as Church Leet this morning, Edgar?"

"I don't mind," said Mr. Reste. "About three miles, is it not?"

"Three miles across the fields as straight as the crow flies. I want to see a man who lives there. He—why that's Pettipher coming here!—the letter-man," broke off Mr. Barbary. Letters were not written every day then, and very few found their way to Caramel Cottage.

Old Joan went to the door, and then came in. She was like a picture. A dark-blue linsey gown down to her ancles, neat black stockings and low, tied shoes, a check apron, and a bow of black ribbon perched in front behind the flapping border of her white muslin mob cap.

"Pettipher says 'tis for the gentleman," said Joan, putting the letter, a thick one, on the table by Mr. Reste.

"Why, it is from Amphlett!" he exclaimed, as he took it up, looking at the great sprawling writing. "What on earth has he got to say?"

Opening the letter, a roll of bank notes fell out. Mr. Reste stared at them with intense curiosity.

"Is it your ship come in?" asked Katrine gaily: for he was wont to say he would do this or that when "his ship came home."

"No, Katrine; not much chance of that. Let me see what he says."

"Dear Reste,—I enclose you my debt at last. The other side have come to their senses, and given in, and paid over to me instalment the first. Thank you, old friend; you are a good fellow never to have bothered me. Let me know your movements when you write back; I ask it particularly. Ever yours, W. A."

"Well, I never expected that," cried Mr. Reste, as he read the words aloud.

"Money lent by you, Edgar?" asked Mr. Barbary.

"Yes; three or four years ago. I had given it up as a bad job. Never thought he would gain his cause."

"What cause? Who is he?"

"Captain Amphlett, of the Artillery, and an old friend of mine. As to the cause, it was some injustice that his avaricious relatives involved him in, and he had no resource but to bring an action. I am glad he has gained it; he is an honest fellow, no match for them in cunning."

Mr. Reste was counting the notes while he spoke; six of them for ten pounds each. Katrine happened to look at her father, and was startled at the expression of his face—at the grasping, covetous, *evil* regard he had fixed upon the notes. She felt frightened, half sick, with some vague apprehension. Mr. Reste smoothed the notes out one by one, and laid them open on the breakfast cloth in a little stack. While doing this, he caught Mr. Barbary's covetous look.

"You'd like such a windfall yourself," he said laughingly to his host.

"I should. For *that* a man might be tempted to smother his grandmother."

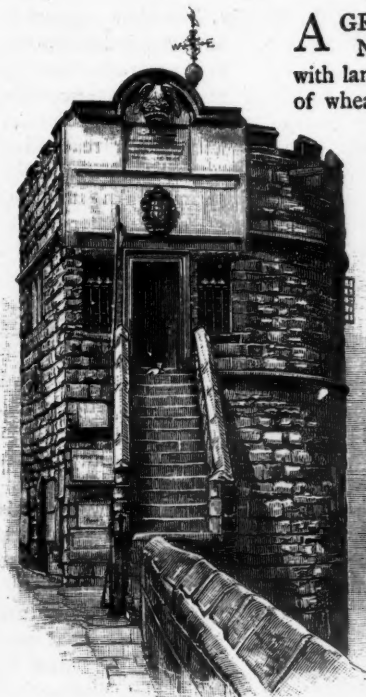
Katrine instinctively shuddered, though the avowal was given in a half jesting tone. A prevision of evil seized upon her.

But there is no room for more this month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AMONG THE WELSH.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.



PHOENIX TOWER.

A GREAT gulf divides Norway from North Wales. A chasm filled up with lands that bear grain, it may chance of wheat or some other grain ; and trees whose leaves have their time to fall—but, as a little Scotch girl once beautifully said, their time to come again. A chasm in which seas ebb and flow and rivers have their tides, and people wax great, and run to and fro upon the earth. There is a mighty sound as of rushing waters, but it is only the murmur of many voices. There is no rest in the length and breadth of the land, but all is excitement, and every one must be in action. Small leagues have brazen trumpets to go before them, and larger ones band themselves into "armies"—with more than trumpets in advance. But over all this hubble bubble is the calm blue sky, now even as it was

in the beginning, as it will be to the end. And those who are faint and weary for want of repose, and sick with watching for signs and tokens, and longing for less of the sounding brass and more of the spirit of old, may look upwards and gaze for ever at that blue sky whose serenity no man can ruffle, and speak this comfort unto their souls : "In quietness and confidence shall be their strength."

But having brought Norway and North Wales into comparison, I must give a reason for doing so ; and I have no better reason than that it has recently fallen to my lot to pass from the one country to the other. Yet, in some ways, perhaps it is hardly wise to enter upon the beauties of Wales whilst the attractions of Norway still linger

vividly in the memory. Whether we will or not, comparisons suggest themselves. The one is a land of mountains, the other of hills: the one has gigantic waterfalls, swift rivers, roaring torrents, immense valleys and endless forests; the other possesses these attractions, but only in miniature. Once or twice, after having taken some trouble and gone some distance to see a Welsh waterfall, I almost felt—by the mere act of involuntary comparison—that it was all a deception. *Le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle.*

On the other hand, last summer, in Norway, I made a pilgrimage



STANLEY HOUSE.

of nearly fourteen hours to a waterfall—walking most of the time—and surely neither saint nor sinner ever reached a more perfect, holier shrine. An immense mass of water came tumbling down from a gigantic height in endless volumes of white foam. The rocks formed a cul-de-sac in a semi-circle, towering and broken, and the water rushed and roared and echoed mightily in this natural basin; drenching spray flew upwards and around in such showers that only those supplied with water-proofs could venture within the sacred precincts of the basin itself. Here was neither disappointment nor disillusion, and twice

twelve hours' labour might have been worthily spent in such a cause. A great waterfall is one of the grandest sights of the world, and the Skæggedalsfoss is considered by many the finest waterfall in Norway—that land, par excellence, of roaring cataracts and rushing torrents.

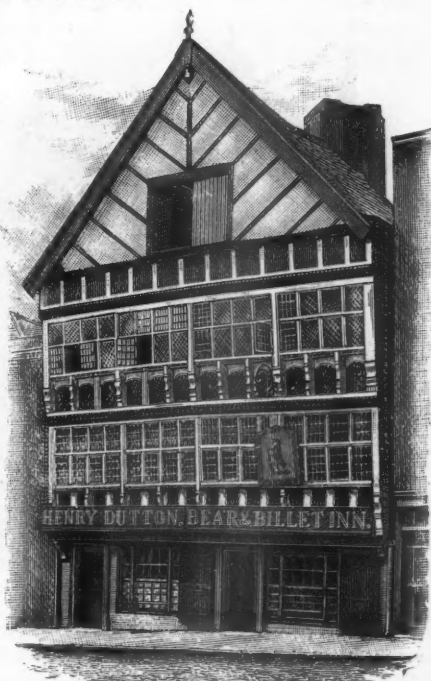
North Wales can show us nothing of this kind. Nevertheless, its attractions are not to be disputed. If they do not take the affections by storm, but more quietly win their way, the result is none the less certain. Many parts you feel that you would like to see over and over again; some must be seen at least once more.

Our rapid manner of going about a country in these days is one of

the great drawbacks to travelling. It is the worm in the bud, the thorn in the rose. Not to become intimate and familiar with all the beauties of nature through which we pass is a positive pain. And yet it is impossible to do so. Long and oft-repeated sojourns would be necessary, and life would be as much too short for the task as it is too brief to read, mark, and digest the works of all the great writers that have lived. In the one case we must be content with seeing and remembering; an acquaintance not a friendship with the beauties of Earth: the other becomes a matter of selection.

And so, reader, to enter at once upon our theme; to abandon comparisons, which at any rate here need find no place; we will suppose ourselves possessed of the magic carpet, or a couple of witches' broomsticks, and, flying through the air over lands and seas, through clouds and amongst the stars, finally alight together in the fair city of Chester. This is a very good starting point for North Wales.

But I am not certain that Chester should be called fair, if the adjective implies youth as well as beauty. A great deal in Chester is undoubtedly modern, but this is exactly what spoils the town. One has heard so much about its antiquity that one expects more than is to be found. All the wonderful drawings and paintings I had seen of the place idealized it beyond conception. They had given me the notion of a species of Nuremberg. In that wonderful old town no modern houses break the spell and silence of the past. The centuries though dead still seem to speak. You walk the streets and everything that greets the eye carries you back to the middle ages. The men and women you meet seem a discord in their nineteenth-century costumes. Surely, too, their faces and forms ought to be old and wrinkled and bowed, not young and laughing and upright: not those bright eyes and earnest hopes and passionate loves. The very nightingales in their



AN OLD INN.

cages as they pour forth a flood of melody by day and night seem out of place: certainly in the night hours we think them so, and wish they had lived and flourished and departed with the bygone days. The very blueness and brightness of the sky seem too new and young and fresh to canopy this ghostly city of a departed world. But the impression is altogether delightful as it is rare, and Nuremberg takes its place for ever in the heart and memory.

Something of this sort, if in a modified form, I expected to find in



GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE.

Chester, and was disappointed. Your entrance to the town is unfortunate, for the railway lands you without the walls, and the streets are new, and the red brick houses seem to blush for their very youth.

But presently you pass under an old gateway, reach the comfortable Grosvenor Hotel, and to a certain extent enter a new world. For round about here in a small space, though not exactly a nutshell, lies all that remains of Old Chester. You are now within the City walls.

No doubt Chester, even in its present state, is unique in England; but it is impossible to help seeing that with the exercise of a little judgment it might have been very much more picturesque,

because more uniform than it is. Had all new houses been built after the one old type, the eye need not have been offended by a modern tenement of straight lines and square windows placed side by side with a fine old building of the sixteenth century with carved woodwork and gabled roofs and latticed panes.

But even many of the ancient houses are not as they were. Time beautifies by destroying, and if buildings are not to go altogether to ruin, they must be restored. For this reason many of the old Chester houses are old only in form and outline. But there are a few exceptions; such, for instance, as Stanley House, which stands back in a

court so small that the house itself seems to have outgrown its site. It is now given over to be the habitation of the humble, or at least the lowly; for humility, unlike the violet, sometimes gives itself airs; and oaken doors admit you into lumber rooms scantily lighted by windows that seem almost in their original condition.

Whilst you are standing as far from the house as possible, against the dead wall—it is only about a yard or two in depth—admiring the pointed gables—three, not seven in number—ancient windows, and carved woodwork with its little Norman arches, out comes the inevitable young man who politely offers to show you everything that you can see for yourself; an offer you as inevitably and politely accept. To-day he is in his Sunday's best—for it is the seventh day—and he



RUINED CHANCEL, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.

takes you round to the back premises, and points out little bits that perhaps might have escaped notice, and pilots you through the above-mentioned lumber room, where certainly you might have come to grief in a solitary inspection. But he does not go through his lesson with the fluency of frequent repetition. The youth is modest in look and tone, slow of utterance, bears himself with a sort of silent apology for offering to do what is almost unnecessary, because the chance of a quid-pro-quo, however small, was not to be resisted. And so one feels sure that he is there only because it happens to be Sunday and tea-time—we can see the festive board through the window and the family party surrounding it—and that to-morrow morning will find him at a more independent, more manly way of earning his living than idling about on the chance of piloting through the old premises anyone whom fate or fortune may throw in his way.

We should very much like to go upstairs and explore the rooms lighted by those fine old windows, and see what other traces of antiquity they contain, but he does not respond to a hint delicately thrown out—perhaps too much so for his penetration. So, fearing to intrude, we dismiss the idea. He gives the correct salute as he disappears through a door which is certainly not ancient into his living-room, and we pass out into the open street and—just about here—a very different world: modern houses, and high walls, and nothing at all out of the common.

But higher up you come to one of the oldest and most dilapidated-looking streets, and some of the rarest houses. There is the famous God's Providence House, with its prominent motto "God's Providence is mine inheritance;" because, at the time of the plague, it was almost the only house in Chester that escaped infection. There is also the date, 1652. But very little remains of the old house except this date and motto. It has been restored, and has lost much of its old character. Just beyond it is Bishop Lloyd's house, of still older date, with quaint carvings. The street itself is narrow and somewhat shabby, and certainly to stand on the opposite side and look down upon the outer surface of the "Row," is to gaze upon a scene and a picture not to be found in any other town in England. They have crypts, too, some of these houses—strange, singular constructions, with fine arches supported by pillars. Here secret services might have been held, in the days when people were not free to choose their own mode of worship, and some, for conscience sake, went bravely to the stake.

Thus it seems that, after all, it is a first impression of Chester that is chiefly disappointing. Day by day the town grows upon you, and becoming more familiar with it, you like it more. You do your best to overlook the modern element, and what does exist of the ancient gradually asserts its influence.

The "Rows," curious in one sense, are not to be imitated. It is as if the ground floor of each house had been removed, or the first floor built out, so that you walk under a long covered passage or arcade, containing the best shops in Chester; an excellent arrangement for rainy weather. But the shops are somewhat dark in consequence. These "Rows" have altogether a very different effect from those "arcades" that you meet with in some of the old towns abroad. Take, for instance, those of Annecy: a long series of massive stone arches, solemn, gloomy, and depressing; suggestive of a bygone age almost of barbarism; an age of darkness, for very little light penetrates to the small shops in the recesses. Nevertheless, by their very grimness, a gloom which seems portentous, and by their regularity, suggestive of a fixed purpose carried out, they become distinctly characteristic, and make a lasting impression upon the mind.

The "Rows" of Chester, on the contrary, are irregular, and are not

carried out in a straight line. There are four streets of "Rows," and they meet at a point called the High Cross, one of the most interesting spots in the town. Turn which way you will from the centre of the road, Chester looks its oldest and best. Bridge Street is a little too open, shows too many modern houses; but in no other town in England is there to be found such a view of antiquity—such interesting and perfect remains of an age whose customs are as extinct as if they had never existed.

Behind us, too, facing Bridge Street, is the fine old church of St. Peter, looking like a small portion detached from some ancient cathedral, adding a grave ecclesiastical dignity to the High Cross, an odour of sanctity, which adds very much to the interest of the scene.

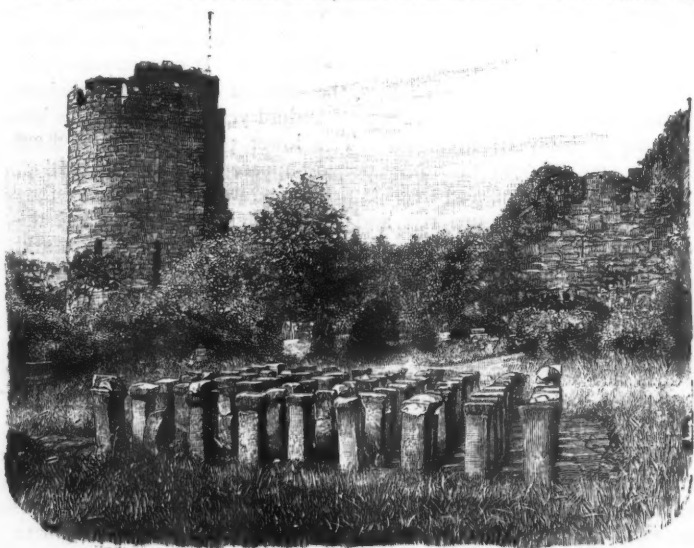
Straight down Bridge Street, with rows on either side, you come to what is said to be the oldest house in Chester. It certainly looks it, and seems ready to crumble into the dust of ages. Nevertheless, its date, taking you back some eight hundred years in the world's history, may possibly be fictitious. The lower part is partitioned off into two small shops; the upper portion apparently is still undivided. It has a gabled roof, and large latticed windows that look as if they *might* have seen the sun rise and set for eight centuries; and the woodwork, to all appearance, might have come out of Noah's ark. The house leans very much to the right, and seems to depend entirely upon its left-hand neighbour for support. On the right-hand it is unsupported. A narrow alley conducts to a door, where a notice informs you that "gentlemen" may obtain lodgings here. It does not add that they must not be too exacting in the matters of light and cleanliness, but as the entrance plainly says that for itself the caution would be superfluous.

Whilst looking at this interesting old relic of the past, a little woman came out of a small shop of "general necessities," and hospitably invited me in to inspect her part of the premises. No thought of a quid-pro-quo was here. She was a genuine lover of the ancient, and ought to have been a member of the Antiquarian Society. With pride and an amount of relish and animation truly refreshing, she pointed out the immense thickness of the walls, the beauty of the windows, the old staircase, the places where windows had been and were no longer, inequalities which were the result of ages, and blackness of carved wood which was not, in her case, the result of neglect. She discoursed eloquently upon antiquities, and when I ventured a half doubt about the age recorded upon the house—I think it was 1065—I found that I had disturbed a slumbering volcano. It was evidently a tender point with her, and I had not been the first to put forth in her hearing so barbarous a suggestion.

There are many other curious houses in Bridge street, though none so old looking as the one just referred to. At the bottom of the street you come to Bridge gate: one of the old gates of the City walls, that at one time used to be closed against all outsiders when the

curfew "toll'd the knell of parting day." This curfew still tolls from the tower of the venerable Cathedral, but there are no gates to respond ; no sentinels to keep guard and patrol with a clash of armour ; no watchword to be given before gaining admittance. All these things have passed away with a former age ; our present troubles and disturbances are of a different kind, but perhaps they come only the more home to us.

Beyond the gate flows the river Dee under a single arch, and just above it a little to the left a small steamer is waiting to take you up the stream as far as Holt and Farndon. She certainly was not built for an excursion boat, and even a small crowd would be



WATER TOWER AND ROMAN REMAINS.

unpleasant on board. But to-day, though market day (it is Saturday, and the day before our visit to Stanley House as recorded above), there are not twenty passengers, and at our end only a woman and her daughter in flounces and feathers and all the colours of the rainbow, who loudly and persistently devour sweetmeats from an unlimited supply, thereby raising within one all sorts of revengeful emotions ; and a sister and two brothers who are going up merely because it happens to be a lovely day, and this is the pleasantest way of spending such a morning. These only add to the pleasure of the trip ; they neither devour lozenges nor indulge in any other irritating habit.

We pass up the stream. Houses line the banks, weeping trees see their own reflections in the water, the grand old Church of St. John, a ruin at each end, stands out boldly. But all this is soon left behind,

and we pass into a river pure and simple, with sweeps and curves, and long stretches of fields, and banks and hedges laden with blackberries. In parts the country is finely wooded and there is much lawn-like land on the right.

Beyond Eaton Hall the river is less interesting, until you come in sight of the fine old Bridge of Holt, which dates back to the fourteenth century, and spans the river with eight arches. Before reaching it the boat draws up alongside the bank and a loose board is thrown from the steamer to the road, and everyone is requested with much boldness to take his life in his hands and make for the shore.

Half way up the hill, when all other passengers have hurried out of sight, I meet an old woman—she might have been ninety—



OLD HOUSE IN BRIDGE STREET.

staggering under the weight of two pails of fresh water which she has been to fetch from a well ever so far off. She struggles over the stile with them, continues her up-hill pilgrimage, and informs me that it is the best water in Cheshire. Perhaps it is ; perhaps she only thinks so ; any way, I sympathise with her and her heavy burden, but she only replies cheerfully that it is worth the fetching, and goes her way.

Farndon seemed a quiet, clean village, consisting apparently of one up-hill street, slightly curved, and at this moment destitute of a single inhabitant. There was a capital little inn in the place, the Nag's Head, and Mrs. Jones, the excellent and obliging landlady, did all she could at a moment's notice. She brought in four times the supply demanded, and when presently I remonstrated at the smallness of her reckoning and pointed to the ruins upon the table, she replied with genuine hospitality : " I only wish, sir, you had taken twice as much."

These types and incidents are rare, and brace up one's faith in human nature, which, with much opposite experience, is wont to get unstrung and out of order.

Whilst bustling about, Mrs. Jones informed me that, though empty now, she was full nearly all the summer, and every summer, and I could well believe it. There was something fresh and bracing in the air of Farndon, which would make it worth while to sojourn there for change and relaxation and rural walks. Farndon was flourishing, but Holt was a poor village—and I thought it looked so, as I strolled through it later on. Many of the people, said mine hostess, were dependent upon their strawberry gardens: gardens where you might day after day enjoy any quantity of strawberries-and-cream for a mere trifle—a luxury in itself sufficient to tempt any one to take up his “country quarters” at the Nag’s Head in the strawberry season. When that season is a good one the inhabitants of Holt manage very well to keep body and soul together, but when the strawberries fail it goes hard with them.

Holt and Farndon are divided merely by the river and the old bridge. Farndon is in Cheshire, Holt in Denbighshire, and, slight though the line is, one can almost tell that in crossing the bridge you have passed out of England into Wales. It is less clean and prosperous, some of the small cottages are not inviting, and the people who inhabit them look rather rough and uncivilised. But it has a fine church, “almost as large as a small cathedral,” said Mrs. Jones, of the Nag’s Head, “and it would be a pity not to see it.” I thought so too, but I had to make the most of the outside. It was locked up, and the sexton was not at hand. I turned into a small beershop to enquire for him, and found there would not be time to hunt him out. The landlady was drawing beer for a group of men, who were lounging on benches; three or four dirty children were howling lustily, and the woman, a poke bonnet tilted on her head, answered with the shortness and independence and scant civility so frequently met with in Wales.

So the only thing to be done was to walk quietly back to the little steamer, which was already making preparations and signals for returning to Chester.

And once again there, I think one appreciated the old town more, even after so short an absence. I turned to St. John’s Church, which is still a grand building, and must once have been very splendid. It is said to date back to the seventh century and the days of Ethelred; has grand Norman arches and pillars, which I have only seen equalled (on British ground) in the cathedral of St. Magnus, in Orkney. St. John’s was formerly the cathedral of Chester. Lately, the belfry fell with a great crash, carrying away the north doorway, which, though well restored, has now lost the beauty of antiquity. The belfry remains a ruin, and a solitary bell, on the south side of the church, rings people to service with a sound not musical though melaneholy. At

the east end are the ruins of the original chancel, with broken Norman arches, lichen-covered in parts, and melancholy ivy here and there clings to crumbling and decaying stone. It is a small but **very** picturesque ruin, which has stood the test of ages ; has seen its own glory and decadence, the rise and fall of nations and dynasties, whilst at its feet the quiet river has flowed and flows on for ever.

The city walls are, of course, one of the great features of Chester. They are about two miles in circumference, and were rebuilt by Ethelfrida in the tenth century. They have four gates, of which the custody was given, in the old days, to noblemen. At one part of the walls you come to the Phoenix Tower, where Charles I. of unhappy memory watched the defeat of his army at Rowton Moor, in 1645. Yet further, you reach the Water Tower and some interesting Roman remains.

A capital spot this from which to view the eclipse that was to take place to-night. And in due course the "full-orbed" moon rose, round as any shield that had helped to win or lose the battle on Rowton Moor on that unhappy day when Charles watched the ebbing of his fortunes. There was not a cloud in any part of the sky, and as the moon rose high and higher, she flooded the whole country with her pure light, and cast a trail of jewels over the river running its course beneath the walls. Then, in the fulness of time, the shadow crept over her surface, and it almost seemed as if the veil separating the seen from the unseen were about to be withdrawn, and ourselves admitted to celestial mysteries.

Slowly but surely the shadow crept on, until the whole country lay shrouded in blackness. There seemed a death in nature somewhere. The period of total obscurity appeared endless, but at last the moon began to emerge from that terrible black veil, that awful shadow, and one drew a breath of relief at the first faint silvery bow of reappearance. During the whole time the walls had been comparatively deserted.

But the glory of Chester is her cathedral. Though small in comparison with many, it is very interesting and full of beauty. The present diocese was founded by Henry VIII., and the Benedictine Abbey of St. Werburgh was chosen as a successor to that of St. John's. Since then, it has undergone many changes, and now shows a mixed style of architecture : the Norman, Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular. Its least pleasing feature is the difference in size between the north and south transepts. The latter, until recently, was partitioned off from the rest of the building as a parish church to St. Oswald's, and here a separate service was held. The partition has been removed, and the transept has been thrown into the cathedral, but it has still to be restored. In size it is out of all proportion with the rest of the building, and is as large as the north transept is small. They differ widely in architecture, the north transept being partly Norman, partly Early English, the south Late Decorated.

But the cathedral has been wonderfully well restored by the late Sir Gilbert Scott. The choir is beautiful, the carved woodwork of the stalls and the screen almost matchless. The light tracery in no way conceals or obscures the outer nave and aisles. The organ is placed outside the choir in the north transept, but the small organ is above the choir screen. It is one of the largest cathedral organs in the kingdom, one of the handsomest, and certainly one of the most beautiful in tone. It is supported by sixteen columns of Italian marble, pillars worthy of their destination.

Through a door in the north transept you pass to the Chapter House and Library on the right, the Cloisters on the left. The greater portion of the cloisters has not been restored, and they are in that state of picturesque decay which the hand of time lays upon all



CRYPT UNDER ONE OF THE OLD HOUSES.

ancient buildings. They are almost black, crumbling in parts well nigh to ruin, peopled with the ghosts of dead and gone Benedictines. These cloisters carry you back in spirit and imagination to the days of the Roman Catholics and St. Werburgh more than any other part of the cathedral. It is delightful to wander about them, and pass into the old refectory on the one side, now used as a practising room for the choristers, or enter the dark and gloomy but interesting crypt on the other. There is nothing more picturesque about the cathedral than these decaying cloisters—which yet probably will not be allowed to crumble away to destruction. But once restored they will lose, of necessity, their greatest charm.

The central—and only—tower of the cathedral, contains a peal of eight bells, one of which rings the Curfew every night at a quarter to nine. Not that the inhabitants then retire to rest, for the streets at

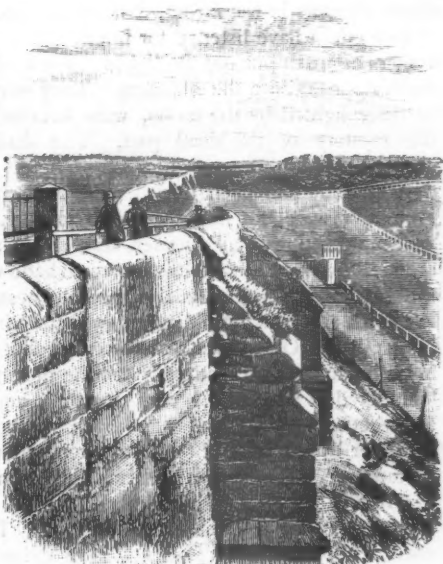
night are filled with loiterers and idlers ; young men and boys lounging about the rows and corners, and looking as if they were possessed by the very spirit of mischief. The oldest bell bears the date 1604, and the inscription :

I, sweetly tolling, men do call,
To taste the meat that feeds the soul.

On Sunday morning there was service in the choir, and at night in the nave. Our beautiful English service is doubly impressive when conducted in such a building, where one seems, indeed, surrounded by the "beauty of holiness." The grand organ pealed out and rolled and swelled through the arches, and the choir took up the strain in voices perfectly trained and attuned. There are few better church choirs than that of Chester, and one chorister especially, in a solo, sent his pure, high voice ringing through the aisles with all the beauty of a magic flute. The accompanying organ fell to the softest strains until its pulsations beat in unison with the waves of the boy's voice. Wave on wave went echoing down the long nave, and throughout all the congregation no hand stirred, no eye wandered ; a "solemn silence" was over all.

Then, the prayers over, the Bishop left his throne and mounted the pulpit stairs, and in an earnest sermon spoke to his hearers of some of the mysteries of the unseen world.

At night, too, the service was equally impressive, and the nave was filled with a large congregation. Above the pillars a long row of gas lights gave effect to the middle aisle, only increased by the shadow of the side aisles and the gloom of the choir beyond the closed gates and the fretted screen. It was a service for the people, and was heartily joined in. Voices rose with one accord in chants and hymns, led by the white-robed choir, whilst the organ put forth its powers, and the very edifice vibrated as if with emotion. The Dean preached : a simple, earnest sermon, most of which he said had been composed forty years ago. It would be unbecoming here



CITY WALLS.

to launch out into praise, but it may be recorded that the preacher carried his hearers with him, for he seemed to possess the gift of sympathy, an earnest simplicity, a forgetfulness of self, and a sincerity in voice and expression which must have gone home to all hearts present.

When the service was over the organist continued for more than half-an-hour to play one thing after another, whilst many kept their seats and listened enchanted. The playing, perfect as it was, showed forth all the capabilities of the instrument. Now the full organ in mighty sounds would swell and crash and vibrate from end to end of the cathedral; and now in softest and gentlest, yet perfectly distinct strains, the plaintive and pathetic vox humana, in sweetest sounds would wane and pulsate about the pillars and arches and die away in silent whispers in the far off, darkened aisles.

One could have listened for hours, but there came the end, and the vergers began to put out the lights. For a moment I went through the north doorway into the cloisters. They were silent and deserted, and, partially lighted by the moon, were haunted by a sense of mystery—the mystery of the dead past. The shadow of death seemed to enshroud them like a visible atmosphere. Here the old Abbots in days gone by had been buried, and who could say that their spirits even now were not haunting these ghostly, decaying precincts? No spot more fitting in all Chester, scarcely in all England. Where the moon threw no light the cloisters were shadowed in a double blackness: the blackness of darkness and the blackness of age. Across there on the north side was the old refectory, with clinging ivy about the crumbling pillars. On the east was the crypt, shut in and locked up to-night, cold, gloomy, earthy, haunted with the memory of ages and ages. One shuddered in passing the very doorway, and involuntarily turned to see whether ghostly hands were opening and silently beckoning to us. Whether by day or night, the cloisters, though small, are wonderfully picturesque; they have a melancholy but an abiding charm.

Then back into the cathedral. Though now nearly in darkness, it was like coming from death into life. The last lights were being extinguished; the last footsteps were dying away towards the south door. The choir looked far off, the aisles were dark and silent. Those deep diapasons and silvery reeds that lately had swelled and crashed and floated and sighed throughout the space, were mute. This, too, seemed a sort of death in life. It was night within and without. As the last lights expired I reached the steps of the south doorway, and heard the last verger with echoing footsteps march down the silent nave.

It was my last vivid impression of Chester, and perhaps the best. Early the next morning I left the old city, and very soon the railway had carried me over the line which separates England from Wales. But the Celtic blood would bubble up and boil over if such a theme were more than touched upon at the end of a paper and we must wait until next month for its further development.

THE CONVERSION OF PROFESSOR NABS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ADONAI, Q.C."

JUST so far as the civilised world extended, just exactly so far extended the celebrity of Professor Nabs. He was one of England's prides, holding, as he did, a professorship in an English University; and one of Scotland's prides, too—for, of course, he was Scotch. Two-thirds of the half-daft geniuses upon the face of this earth are Scotch.

His scientific works had begun by setting all the learned scientific people, and all the learned *un*scientific people of the British Isles thrilling with excitement. Then fierce quarrels raged up and down the country, during which "Professor Nabs" in extra-sized types figured upon the bills of all the newspapers, until, at last, nearly all the world had got hold of this somehow:—Professor Nabs is a great and a wicked man.

Of course, that he was wicked very few indeed would have cared to deny. For, in the first place, his works were the very essence of wickedness—or so it was said; secondly, was he not the bosom crony of such sinners as Marlow, the philosopher, Spence, the geologist, Kingston, the astronomer; thirdly he never went to church; and fourthly, it was well known that he did such things upon a Sunday as no man who was not a sinner would ever dare to do.

As to his appearance, the reputation of it was almost as wide as the reputation of his learning. He was a very ugly as well as a very wicked man. He was excessively small and excessively thin, and he had a little round, fat face, with a monstrous mouth, the false teeth of which were perpetually tumbling together with a gurgle and a click; and he had a way of pressing up his lips so that they reminded one of the shape of a new moon. Two deep, wavering furrows, like black clouds, guarded each side of his little impertinent chin. His eyes were impertinent too, very black and ridiculously large, and crowned by a massive brow as white as snow, which was, of course, the strong point of his face. He walked with a little mincing step, like a dancing-master's, and, summer and winter, his small form was shrouded down to the knees by a faded brown overcoat.

Chumbleton proper lay in a valley. At the outskirts of the town stood St. Peter's, the fashionable church of the place, and from the door of St. Peter's a straight country road, called Cliff Road, bordered by two green banks, led up a hill to where a colony of villas and semi-detached houses had sprung up of late years. Professor Nabs' house, a fine rambling old place, overlooked one of these green banks, midway betwixt St. Peter's and the villas, and a beautiful old-fashioned garden stretched away for several acres to the right of it.

Now it so happened that Professor Nabs had a mania for architecture; and as his three learned friends, like the sinners they were, generally chose Sunday for running down to see him, it was not an uncommon thing for the righteous worshippers of St. Peter's to be disturbed by an atrocious Scotch accent bursting in through the half-open windows with such profane snatches as "heedjous galleries," "meeserable buttresses," which were surely enough to put even saints beside themselves.

In addition to his mania for architecture, he had a mania for the pianoforte, which was still more frightful; for he was exceedingly fond of noise, and had a voice which was nothing if it was not loud. Thus it was a yet less uncommon thing for the same worshippers, on their way home to the colony of villas from the "heedjous galleries" of St. Peter's, to be made to turn red or blue, according to their complexions, and angry or amused, according to their dispositions, as they passed the open windows of Professor Nabs, by the sound of a pair of arms going like sledge-hammers, and a pair of pedals creaked up and down, and occasionally let fly with a bang, and a voice like a fog-horn, all hard at work upon some secular song which happened to be popular at the moment.

And yet so great was Professor Nabs, and so overwhelming is the power of greatness, that the élite of Chumbleton walking arm-and-arm along High Street with the élite of somewhere else, did not, on discerning a strange object on the horizon, see something to interest them on the other side of the street, but on the contrary bowed respectfully to the object, and remarked, with a certain amount of awe and pride: "Did you notice that person who lifted his hat to me just now?—that's Professor Nabs."

The Hospital for Incurables of Chumbleton stood in one of the dullest outskirts of the town; a low, rather damp house, with a tannery on one side, and a Salvation Army Hall on the other. It was not an agreeable place of residence for incurables or anyone else.

Upon the afternoon of the 25th April, 18—, six females, all more or less young, were sitting around a table in one of the dingiest rooms of this dingy house. It was the meeting of the Flower-Mission.

The first thing that struck one upon a cursory glance at this meeting was the extreme earnestness of its members. At the present moment a great hush of more than usually intense seriousness had fallen over them. Suddenly a small woman at one end of the table rose and spoke.

"Ladies," she said, "we now proceed to something which is even more important to each and all of us than the beloved work of distributing sweet-smelling blossoms to our beloved incurables. I mean what is commonly known amongst us as *Our Secret Mission*. I need not say that I am sure you all know to what I allude."

A murmur ran swiftly round amongst the other five. "The conversion of Professor Nabs."

"Just so," said the little lady, shaking her head and sighing. "Miss Smith, would you be so kind as to read the reports of the Society upon this subject."

A tall, pale young person, with elevated eye-brows, and a pince-nez settled a little awry upon an aquiline nose, opened a note-book slowly. The little lady sat down, and Miss Smith, in a quavering voice, began :—

"The conversion of Professor Nabs was first undertaken by this Society upon the 29th of March last. Upon the evening of that day an anonymous letter was posted, addressed to the Professor, and signed—'A Sincere Friend'—couched in the following terms :— 'Professor Nabs,—You are working the ruin not only of yourself, but of thousands of innocent souls. Pause, turn, retrieve the past, before it is too late!' The Sunday after the despatch of this letter, a tract was slipped under the door by me. It was a very impressive one : 'What dost Thou Do upon Sunday?' Just at the moment I put it in, Professor Nabs happened to be playing very wildly upon the pianoforte, so I thought I might venture to ring the bell slightly, and wait to see what would be the result.

"The servant must have taken it straight upstairs, for only a minute had elapsed when the piano stopped ; but an instant afterwards, to my great surprise, the keys were banged loudly about in all directions, making a most deafening and disagreeable noise ; and Professor Nabs began calling out again and again the very name of the tract I had just given in : 'What dost Thou Do upon Sunday?'

"I went away very much disheartened ; but I have since heard from a friend of mine at the University—to whom I did not, of course, communicate any of the foregoing—that the improvisation of anthems has lately become a favourite pastime of Professor Nabs. I was very much consoled to hear this, as I had thought he simply meant to insult me.

"A week after this, however, when I was just in the act of leaving another tract at his door in the same manner, it opened suddenly, and a servant said he had been told to give the depositor of these tracts his master's thanks and compliments, and the housemaid was now supplied with plenty of waste-paper for several months to come.

"Last Saturday — all the members know what took place last Saturday ! However, as it is down on the books, I may as well repeat it.

"Last Saturday, after dark, the Flower Mission met by arrangement, and went out in a body to Professor Nabs' house, St. Peter's Cliff. They settled themselves into a careless group upon the green bank under his windows, and sang in chorus that most effective and

impressive hymn—'Black, Black, Black, as thou art.' As you all know, however, scarcely was the first verse finished when Professor Nabs thrust his head out of the window, and waving his hands in a most rude fashion, called out 'Go away ; go away.' I am bound to state, however, that I have since heard Mr. Spence, the geologist, and Mr. Kingston, the astronomer, were just then engaged on a scientific consultation with Professor Nabs in his drawing-room.

"That is all the Society has to report, so far, upon the subject of the conversion of Professor Nabs."

Miss Smith resumed her seat. There was a momentary pause of indecision. Suddenly, the little lady tapped for attention, and pushing her chair back, rose. "I beg to move," said she, "that this Mission shall sit in absolute silence for five minutes, during which it shall be each member's duty to do her utmost to think of what should next be attempted for the conversion of Professor Nabs. At the end of the five minutes, all can speak."

The motion having been unanimously carried, each member buried her head in her hands, and all began to think earnestly.

Amongst the six Flower Missionaries there was one poor creature.

She was not at all poor in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word ; but there was a certain confusion of ideas upon general subjects, and entire absence of all detail regarding geography, history, and arithmetic, as well as an utter want of *manliness*, so to speak, which had very soon brought the other members of the Mission to a unanimous conclusion that Miss Isabella Linn was but a poor creature. She would have fainted from sheer nervousness if she had had to read the reports, like Miss Smith, or to address the meeting, like the little woman, Miss Pointer. And, besides that, she was actually pretty, in a fair, delicate, old-fashioned sort of way, which is, of course, a decided disadvantage to any woman upon even so limited a sphere of the higher walks of life as Flower Missions. She was only a poor creature, with a large house and garden, and a kindly heart.

Thus, it came to pass that at the end of the five minutes, when one stood up and proposed one thing, and another stood up and proposed another thing, Miss Isabella Linn sat silent and blushing in her place. For, to begin with, she had not been able to think of anything ; and, secondly, if she had, she would never have summoned up courage enough to propose it.

And yet, so strange are the workings of Providence, and the ways of Nature, that out of all the six, there was not one who took Professor Nabs' case so seriously and bitterly to heart as Miss Linn.

Like many another and more famous woman, if she had but little intellect, she had a mighty faith ; and so, all through the long balmy night following that meeting, little Miss Linn tossed and retossed upon her bed, all for the sake of poor unworthy benighted Professor Nabs. And just when the cold, grey dawn began to creep in, she came

to such a tragical resolve, that the very horror of it made her bury her fair little head under both pillows, and soon she was fast asleep.

When she got up in the morning, her feelings were, doubtless, much the same as those experienced by Jerome of Prague and John Huss a few minutes before their execution; only that theirs, of course, could not have been half so fearful, because they were Jerome of Prague and John Huss, whereas this was only little Miss Isabella Linn, a poor creature.

At half-past ten o'clock she put on her new lavender print, and her white muslin hat, with the buttercups in the front of it; and having filled a large basket with the choicest lilies of the valley and white lilac in her garden, sallied out by the back way to Professor Nabs'.

Now, it so happened that Professor Nabs had received by that morning's post a letter, signed by four bishops, earnestly entreating him to suppress a certain number of a certain pamphlet, issued by him to the students of Chumbleton University; and as he had not the faintest intention of doing such a thing, he was necessarily in high good humour, and thought he felt very much like having a tune upon the piano. Therefore, when the message came upstairs that there was a lady waiting to see him upon important business, he was a little ruffled. Still he said he would see her. He happened to drop his music just as the door opened, and had said a very reprehensible expression three times over, before he dropped it again with a deliberate bang, his mouth going up, up, in the new-moon shape, and his whole little self expanding with indignation. The poor creature's face and lips had turned whiter than her own lilies, and it seemed as if all the starch had come out of the lavender print. After an instant of terrific pause on either side, she managed to take a faltering step forwards, and stammered, holding out the heavy basket with one of her small, shaking hands by way of opening the conversation:

"I—I—have brought you—some—flowers."

It is probable that in the whole course of his long life, Professor Nabs had never been so much surprised. That any human being should be so incomprehensibly extraordinary as to offer a basket of lilac and lilies of the valley to a man whose four acres of garden were literally teeming with them, was in itself sufficiently astounding; and, of course, the way and manner of the offering was a hundredfold more so. There was a pause of one other instant, during which the basket continued to shiver in the outstretched hand of Miss Linn; then, very suddenly, the new-moon mouth came down with a jerk, and Professor Nabs advanced, and took it into his own.

"Oh," said he; "thank you. My glasses have just gone down to be washed; but I dare say they'll come up by-and-bye. Sit down."

She did so, upon the very edge of a wicker-work chair, and there ensued another awkward pause. Then Professor Nabs made a grab at the music on the floor, and settled it once more upon the piano.

"I was just going to sing something when you came in," said he; "and if you don't mind, I'll just still do so."

"Thank you," replied the flower-missionary; so with a tremendous shout and a bang, Professor Nabs struck the first chords of "Bonnie Dundee," and thundered on through all the three verses.

"Ah," said he, "I like that tune. It's nice and loud. I don't like many Scotch tunes, but I like that one."

"I like loud tunes, too," faltered Miss Linn. "I have a set of "Bonnie Dundee" marked F. F. all through; but I can never get it loud enough."

"F. F. all through," exclaimed Professor Nabs, with interest. "Dear me! I should like to see that set. Most extraordinary that I should never have come across it. It is a pity you can never get it loud enough," continued he, "but—I think I might manage it."

"I dare say," replied Miss Linn; and added, with a great blush: "There are some nice hymns at the end of the same book."

"O—h, indeed!" said he, opening his eyes slightly. "Well, you might lend me that book, and if the hymns are F. F. too, perhaps I'll have a bang at them also. Pray, are you the young lady who hangs about my house and leaves tracts at the door?"

"N—no," faltered Miss Linn.

"Oh, you're *not*," said Professor Nabs, running his hands up and down the piano, and covering her with a piercing flash of his raven eyes. "Then who are you?"

She twisted and untwisted her hands, and grew as white as her lilies again. "I—I am Miss Isabella Linn, a Flower Missionary to the Incurables."

"What Incurables?" asked Professor Nabs, with sudden interest.

Now, it is a trait of character common to all poor creatures, that if they have a hobby, they are sure to be able to talk about it. Therefore, as Miss Linn's hobby was undeniably the Incurables, the very mention of their name made, as it were, another woman of her, and she at once began with comparative ease.

"I go to the Incurables every week. There are thirty of them—fourteen men and sixteen women. Only seven out of the thirty are able to go to church. There is one old gardener's wife, who has been there for forty-two years, and all that time she has never seen a tree. There is an old man, John Thomson, who used to play a barrel-organ in the street twenty years ago; but he fell down a gas-hole in the dark at the time of the Prince of Wales's marriage, and he has never been out of bed since. The matron says he still wanders in his sleep about barrel-organs, although he has never again heard the sound of one."

"Mercy on me!" faltered Professor Nabs. "And haven't they a piano?"

"Oh, no, indeed," replied Miss Linn glibly; "and even if they had, I don't think there is anyone who could play it to them. There

is a tannery on one side, and a Salvation Army Hall on the other——”

“That ought to be lively, now,” interposed the Professor.

“They don’t seem to like it,” answered she, a little dubiously. “Perhaps the meetings are not very musical.” And noticing, poor creature as she was, that Professor Nabs’ raven eyes had suddenly begun to sparkle through a mist of dimness, she added gently: “Perhaps you would rather I didn’t talk any more about the Incurables.”

He raised himself with a brisk movement, and thundered the scale of C from end to end of his piano. “My dear,” said he, a little indistinctly on account of the noise, “my mother was an incurable.”

“I am exceedingly interested about the barrel-organ man,” he resumed, after a minute. “Why in the world don’t they provide him with a barrel-organ? Why in the world don’t they provide them all with a piano?”

“I have told you that, even if they had one,” replied Miss Linn, “I don’t think there is anybody who would be able to play it to them. I suppose,” added she, quite unexpectedly to herself, as if illuminated by a sudden flash of inspiration, “you wouldn’t play for them sometimes?”

As soon as she had spoken, she almost fainted at her own audacity. It did not, however, appear to have any particularly alarming effect upon Professor Nabs. He sighed deeply, and ran his fingers fitfully up a chord or two.

“I—I am not accustomed to playing in public,” he said at length.

“Would—would it make you nervous?” asked she, timidly.

“I don’t know,” replied Professor Nabs, getting rather red, and taking up the question with great seriousness. “I have played occasionally to a friend of mine, Mr. Spence, and I offered to play to Mr. Kingston the other day, but he refused, not being musical. My window is also very often open when I play, but I don’t suppose anyone remarks me. I also played to you.—But what is all this going to lead to?” added he abruptly, and rather loudly.

The poor creature was startled, and it doesn’t do to startle poor creatures. Her lips began to quiver, and, instead of giving a precise answer to such a precise question, as she ought to have done, she gave no answer at all.

Now, the one thing that Professor Nabs could not abide was silence. Miss Linn’s silence at once put him out of sorts to such an extent that he repeated his question with quite a shout and in a still more undesirable form.

“What are you doing here?”

It doesn’t do to shout at poor creatures. It fairly terrified this one all to pieces. She had just time to raise herself slightly in order to get her handkerchief out of the pocket of her lavender print dress, and in her agony of confusion she simply told the whole truth.

“I belong to the Flower Mission,” she began, her voice quavering

and her heart beating, "but, at the same time, we have a Secret Mission and it is the Conversion of Professor Nabs.—Oh, Professor Nabs!" continued poor Miss Linn, who had now fairly broken down, and held her handkerchief to her eyes: "if you would only reform! If you would only take to good ways, and come to church on a Sunday. You have time yet; you don't know how soon it may be too late. And—and——this is why I'm here—to tell you this."

There was a dead pause of an instant, and then Professor Nabs began to laugh. Yet not unkindly; almost, it seemed, as if he saw a great deal of humour in all this, and was immensely tickled by it.

"Poor creature!" exclaimed he at last.

"I know that," replied Miss Linn, from behind her pocket-handkerchief.

"This is a new idea," continued the Professor grimly; "the opening of a new and a great field," waving his hand slightly towards the open window. "I have heard of many missions, for the conversion of many heathen, but this is the first time I *ever* heard of a mission for the conversion of a Professor of Mathematics. But," he continued more snappishly, "it won't come to anything. Secret things never do, any more than silent things. So you want me to go to church, do you? My dear, kind creature," continued he, in a graver tone, "don't trouble or distress yourselves about me. I was beyond conversion half a century before you were born"—which was a direct libel upon himself, for Professor Nabs was only just turned forty. "I, too, am an old, old incurable."

She pricked up her ears at the word, and dried her blue eyes.

"If you please that is because you don't go to church," she replied illogically. "It is in a large seat not far from the side-door that the Incurables sit. They come in always just in time for the sermon. There is old Roger Bryan, with the twisted spine, and quite blind. They lead him in, and he has a very bad temper, somehow. The man who always leads him died last week, though. And there's that man's sister, a girl with a white face, and a great lot of yellow hair. And they say she'll soon be dead too. Old Mrs. Hodge, with the black shawl, looks so well that you really never would think she hadn't any arms——"

"I say," screamed Professor Nabs, raising himself suddenly, and bringing his hand down with a bang upon the piano, "what are you telling me all this for? I can't stand it, and I won't."

And before poor Miss Linn had recovered from the shock, he pranced over to the door, and held it open for her to pass out. Then, shuffling noisily downstairs after her, he threw open the front door, and all of a sudden, with a kindly action, laid a detaining hand upon the lavender print dress.

"My dear," said he, "I won't have any Secret-Missions converting me. If that Flower-Mission wants to convert me, why doesn't it say so openly? If it wants to convert me, it can tell the town so—and

so shall I ; and it can ask me to go to church with it ; and, just for once in a way, I *will* go to church with it. Nobody shall ever have it in their power to say that Professor Nabs refused to encourage a new idea. But as for more young women hanging about my doors, and sticking tracts in my letter-box, I object to the thing on principle, and won't have it. And now you can go home and tell the rest of them that from me."

It was Sunday morning, and the bells of St. Peter's were ringing for church. A fine, sunshiny day ; the little white clouds sped merrily away over the laughing blue sky ; the little birds were twittering in and out of the green banks bordering Cliff Road ; the lilacs and the hawthorns were smelling at all the corners ; the yellow sand of the church square kept firm in its place in spite of the breeze, for there had been a shower last night, and it was still damp. The great budding laburnum in the middle of the square nodded its golden pods to and fro ; and, meantime, the bells rang out up above in the tower of St. Peter's.

Inside the church the long ruby and green and fawn-coloured beams were lighting up the battered plaster saints, and glorifying the pure indestructible marble, and glaring fiercely at the red cloth of the clumsy organ-gallery. It was nearly eleven, and most of the high-backed pews were comfortably filled. Little old women had begun to turn over the leaves of their aged prayer-books ; respectable heads of families fastened their eyes dreamily on the big wooden cross over the entrance to the chancel, and thought of to-morrow's expenses ; their flippant sons and daughters looked at each other. And two or three, dotted sparingly about, were remembering that they had come to pray ; but even they had a general idea that it was oppressively hot ; and that the lilacs and laburnums were smelling sweetly outside.

By-and-bye the organ began to speak, and went thundering and singing eloquently to itself in a way so utterly beyond and superior to everything else in the church—except perhaps the old brown battered saints lit up by the glowing beams of the windows—that even the little old women shut their prayer-books, and listened with bent heads and hushed breath.

Just as the bell stopped and eleven tolled out, the vestry door opened, and the long double row of white choristers trooped briskly in. Then the prayer-books were opened again, and soon the whole congregation was declaring with one voice that it had done those things which it ought not to have done—which was indeed true.

It was just towards the middle of the Absolution that a noise in the middle aisle made every pew start round, as if impelled by one electric shock, and stare as they had probably never stared before. No wonder, either : knowing, as they did, nothing about the Flower Mission, and less than nothing about the Mission for the Conversion of Professor Nabs.

First of all, there was little Miss Linn, in her white muslin and buttercup hat. She looked half dead with fright, her big, pretty blue eyes wandering all around her in a terrified, agonising sort of way, her whole manner saying as plainly as possible, "Here's Professor Nabs." Next there were three members of the Flower Mission—three earnest young women: one short and flabby, who plodded over the tiles with fat, noisy steps, another who turned her toes in, and a third with long earrings, who, having some idea of elegance, advanced with hands drooping from the wrist, and long up-and-down steps like a camel's. Thirdly, there was Miss Smith, who settled her eye-glass all the way up, and Miss Pointer, who hid her shame behind her pocket-handkerchief. Last of all, there was—Professor Nabs.

All the rest of this strange scene went for nothing in the minds of the spectators, as soon as their startled senses drank in the fact that before them, in flesh and blood, was Professor Nabs. He pranced triumphantly after Miss Smith and Miss Pointer, his yellow-green hat in one hand, a very large prayer-book and hymn-book held prominently in the other. The ruby beams played on his big, snow-white brow, as he passed by the brown saints in the niches. It quite seemed as if these battered saints were lending a little of their borrowed lustre to him.

Up the long aisle went Miss Linn, and made a violent dash into the two big empty pews waiting for the Incurables, whither she was followed in due course by the rest of the Flower Mission and Professor Nabs. By this time the congregation had so far recovered from their surprise as to be able to return to their devotions.

If there was one thing that St. Peter's prided itself in more than another, it was the singing of the choir. The congregation would as soon have thought of joining in the Rector's part of the Litany, as of joining in the singing. To Professor Nabs, however, who knew none of these things, it seemed that all this rising and falling of the voices was but a very poor affair; and by way of, as he mentally expressed it, helping them on a bit, he struck up with such a lusty and discordant shout, that the little boys of the choir giggled outright, and the elder members of it turned crimson from shame and discomfiture.

Professor Nabs, however, thought he was getting on nicely. The organ exhilarated him, being so much louder than anything he could produce from the piano, so that he excelled even the wildest of his every-day efforts. He had all the abandon of a great artist, too, and was so much carried away by his own enthusiasm during the psalms, that he shook his head and emphasized himself from first to last, generally coming in a little too late at the end of each verse. Indeed, he was so much struck with the advantages possessed by the organ over the piano as an accompanying instrument, that he sat quite quietly all through the reading of the first lesson, busy with an abstruse calculation as to how much income he would lose, how much interest he would have to pay, and how big a lump sum it would cost,

to buy an organ as large as this one of St. Peter's, and to build an organ-chamber for it behind his drawing-room. He was thus alike oblivious to the curiosity of the congregation, the burning indignation of the Rector, and the blushes of the Flower Mission. By the time the second lesson began, however, he had made up his mind that the organ scheme was impossible; and as Miss Linn happened to be sitting next him, he thought he might as well point out a few of the most glaring architectural delinquencies to her, until little Miss Linn was so terror-stricken that she almost went straight off into hysterics.

The prayers came to an end, and just as the Rector mounted into his pulpit, the side door opened, and the seven poor Incurables came tottering in. It was a strange practice this, probably instituted by the Rector. To more than one of the Incurables it seemed as if they had begun at the wrong end of the service; but very possibly the Rector thought it was an easy thing to say prayers at home: whereas it was an exceedingly difficult thing to listen to a sermon such as he could deliver, in the wards of an Incurable Hospital.

They were seven respectable, faint and weary-looking Incurables; there was plenty of room for their poor, tired limbs in the long pews, even without crushing Professor Nabs and the six Flower Missionaries.

Professor Nabs! What had come over him? From the first moment his eyes lighted on the white faces and distorted forms, the grin upon his face had died like a beam of sunshine at the coming of snow. And even as Miss Linn brightened up, and began to look about her a little, shadows of darkness gathered about his white brow, and pain quivered around the eyes. Until by-and-bye he began to clasp and unclasp his hands, and to mutter and shake his head to himself, until the surrounding pews were divided in feeling as to whether they should break out into tears or into laughter.

There was one old woman who particularly seemed to fascinate him. He turned his eyes upon her, then shut them spasmodically; only to open them and fasten them upon her again: a whole world of concentrated pain in their eloquent black depths. And as time and the sermon went on he grew only the more violently agitated, waving himself about, and leaning his head down, until at last the whole church was trembling with excitement to know what would happen next.

They knew before very long. All of a sudden he raised himself, and stammering something to Miss Linn, crushed his way past her, and the other Missionaries, and the poor Incurables, and fled down the middle aisle out of the church, banging the big oak door behind him.

It was all so sudden that for fully three minutes after he was gone neither Rector, nor missionaries, nor congregation had been able to recover themselves. Besides which, even if they had been stones of

the ground, instead of stolid Englishmen, that poignant half-whisper stammered to Miss Linn, must surely, surely have been pathetic enough to move them :

“ My mother was an Incurable.”

So this was what came of earnestness ! Poor Flower Missionaries ! Deserted by Professor Nabs, they sat alone, covered with shame and contumely ; the butts of the whimsical, the observed of all observers, from the Rector down to the Incurables themselves.

Yes ; but the next morning !

The next morning Professor Nabs paid a visit to the stuffy little Incurable Hospital. Half an hour afterwards it was known all through Chumbleton that he had delivered over his big, old-fashioned roomy house, and big, sweet-smelling garden, and comfortable furniture and piano, all—for henceforth and for evermore—to the Incurables. In the morning he took a small lodging for himself in St. Peter's Square ; and, to the immense disconcertment of the organist of St. Peter's, a big back pew in the organ gallery. The Flower Missionaries felt just a little better when these things happened in the morning.

Day after day the Incurables sat about the sweet lawns, and under the shady trees, breathing forth one long chorus of blessings to Professor Nabs. Sunday after Sunday Professor Nabs roared to his heart's content, under the very shadow of the organ, and then watched the Incurables from afar with twinkling eyes ; while the people in the pews below whispered to any strangers who might happen to be with them : “ That's Professor Nabs ; I'll tell you afterwards about—the Conversion of Professor Nabs.”

What if there were some people hard-hearted enough to say that they did not believe in his conversion at all ? And what if there were others strange enough to think he must have been converted all along ? The most and the wisest held up their hands in amazement, that a great and a wicked man, like Professor Nabs, could have been converted by the like of a Flower Mission, and little Miss Isabella Linn—a poor creature.

A poor creature ! Everybody wondered, after a little, how they could have made such a mistake. Early one sultry autumn morning, Professor Nabs removed again ; this time to a larger house with a larger and even sweeter garden than his own had been. Professor Nabs was married to Miss Linn, and went to live in Miss Linn's house. And after a time the house became not a bit too large for its inmates, and there was not a happier household in all the country round. Well, the Chumbleton people were getting used to surprises ! A poor creature indeed ! Everybody bowed low to the great Mrs. Nabs ; occasionally even adding with a sigh, which might mean many things :—“ Ah ! I used to know her as little Miss Isabella Linn.”

No. I. OF THE FIRST BOOK.

THE room was one of those harmonious little bowers often seen in these æsthetic days. Nora had fallen in love with the description of a violet boudoir, and when her taste was consulted about her own boudoir she unhesitatingly declared it should be hung and furnished in shades of purple from the deepest to the palest, and it was done.

On this afternoon her own dress harmonised with the room. Violet silk and velvet trained over the purple carpet, and a band of sparkling amethyst violets bound her golden hair. Even the air was laden with the faint fragrance of the fresh flowers.

Nora was seated at the piano playing, while Philip Leighton leaned his fair head against the dark damask of an easy chair, and listened with half-closed eyes. His violin lay lovingly against his heart, and his long, slender "violin hand," still carelessly held the bow.

"Play No. I. of the *Lieder*," he said, as she paused, with a faint, inquiring chord; "the one they call 'Sweet Remembrance.'"

She shivered slightly, and opened her lips to refuse, then resolutely turning, she began to play. Philip's eyes were open now, and he watched her closely, as, with tight-shut mouth and sad, strained eyes, she played it through with rare feeling, but evident pain. Like a flash, there passed through his mind the thought of a cruel wind driving before it two forms with faces he knew. As the last note died away Nora rose so pale and wan that Philip started to his feet, looking at her in surprise; but almost instantly her colour returned, and she laughed lightly.

"I once read," he said, quietly, as he re-seated himself in his purple chair, "a very strange story about everyone having a key-note. A certain note in the scale dominated over them in some mysterious fashion, and everyone who discovered this possessed a singular power over the person who responded to it. The story pretended that this was universal. I think it fanciful myself, though I have never tried to prove it. I am certain, however, that I have found a combination of sounds which has a strange effect upon you, Nora. Why do you never play that piece without evident suffering?"

Again a slight shudder passed over her; but after a moment's hesitation, she replied, "I do not know. That it is so is true, and although I am unconscious of changing colour, I know that, too, is so; for after playing it, people have sometimes come up and offered me a fan or vinaigrette, as if they thought me faint."

"What does it make you think of?" he asked.

"Of the wind. Whoever named it '*Doux Souvenir*' must have

had different ears from mine. It also makes me think of, or see, a picture."

"Representing ——?"

"Two shadowy figures driven by the wind. Such sad, sad looks they turn one on the other; but sadness full of longing, lingering love."

This time he, too, turned pale. He rose. "My dear Nora," he said, "this is growing absurd. Absolutely I begin myself to shiver. Come, accompany me; let us play it together."

Complying at once, she went to the piano. Once or twice she raised her eyes to his face beseechingly, as if imploring him to stop; but he was mercilessly determined to fight away this "something," and he held her to the very last. Softly, faintly, the murmuring wind-sounds died away, until they blended into silence; but as he turned to chide her playfully, her eyes looked dimly into his, then closed as she fainted in his arms.

Neither had noticed her father, who, drawn by the music, had been standing in the curtained doorway. He hurried in as his daughter fell, and taking her somewhat abruptly from Philip's arms, said a word to him, and the young man retired. A moment after, Nora opened her eyes in vague wonder, and, seeing her father's face, could recall nothing of what had passed. He gently explained.

"I was just going to call your mother," he added; "but since you are better—come, take a turn up and down with me; there now, your colour is coming. Nora, I will take this opportunity to say that I do not wish you to see so much of Philip."

"O papa, he had nothing to do with my fainting—nothing at all."

"Do you know," said her father, slowly, "all the circumstances of Philip's life?"

"No!" she answered, frankly; "I do not. I only know there is something painful in his past about which no one speaks."

"It concerns a woman," began her father, and then he hesitated.

"Papa," said Nora, "if you wish to tell me anything, whatever it may be, do not be afraid of agitating me. Philip has never made love to me—is nothing to me, as you seem to fear."

"Ah, then," in a tone of relief, "you ought to know the story. Philip is married, and his wife is supposed to be living."

In spite of herself, Nora shivered and turned pale.

"Well, when did this happen? Please tell me all," she said, as quietly as she could.

"It isn't a long story, and it's not a very romantic one. He was drawn into the thing when a college youth. He married his landlady's daughter privately; and six months after she ran away with his most intimate friend. All this before his college course was ended. He took no steps to trace his wife, and there the matter has rested."

"I am glad you told me this, papa," Nora said, simply. "One ought to be posted up on these matters."

Her manner then and after was so calm that her father congratulated himself on his timely revelation. "I might have been too late," he said to himself.

Days passed. Philip did not appear. Then one day a package came for Nora, containing a very small copy of "*Doux Souvenir*," exquisitely bound in violet. From the pages dropped a note:

"NORA,—I have seen your father, who tells me you know all; this has brought me to a sense of my own peril, and I feel I dare not meet you again.—PHILIP."

Nora told herself she should not, would not care, and she forced herself to be brave; but she did care, for all that, and she laid away "*Doux Souvenir*"—ah! "*Triste Souvenir*," and never played it now. Still her life went on the same; and one evening she found herself in the artist's reception, in company with some friends. Exquisitely dressed groups passed up and down before the beautiful pictures, the air was filled with sweet sounds and the scent of rare flowers, and Nora was almost forgetting to feel sad. There was a pause in the music, and her friends were chattering gaily around her, when softly, sweetly from an adjoining room came the sounds of "*Doux Souvenir*." Turning quickly, Nora met Philip's eyes.

He stepped forward. "I must speak to you this once," he said.

With a word of excuse to her friends, she took his offered arm, and walked with him up and down, always within sound of the song.

"Nora," he whispered, passionately. "I cannot keep away from you—I cannot live without you. Speak one word to strengthen me, to comfort me."

But the same set look was on her face, and she stopped suddenly. Her eyes were fastened on a picture hanging near. Two shadowy forms driven by a terrible, cruel wind, and the low, sad, moaning of the song might have been the sound of its passing.

His sad eyes followed hers, his face, too, grew deathly white.

"I accept the portent," he sighed: "I take the warning. Come away, Nora, come away. Oh, come!"

"No," she answered, dreamily; "I would rather stay."

"Nora," he pleaded, "won't you listen to me? I implore you, for my sake, if you will not for your own."

"I cannot move," she whispered; "something holds me to the spot."

A look of torture passed over his face, followed by one of sudden relief, as a young artist passed close to him. "Ernest!" he said, addressing him, "quick! stop that music. I will explain later—only be quick!"

An exclamation of surprise and pain escaped the artist's lips; but the next moment he dashed forward, saying: "The lady has fainted! Here, this way; I will show you." He threw wide a small door beside

them, which had been concealed by a heavy curtain, and opened into a quiet room.

Philip carried in Nora and laid her on a lounge, while the other hastened to admit the air. Then while she lay restored, but white and still, too weak to open her eyes, she heard the stranger say: "Philip, old friend, forgive me if you can. I loved her; you did not."

Philip only answered quietly: "Where is she now?"

"Dead," groaned the artist; "dead two months since. You never cared for her, and I would have given my life to save her. Do not excuse my sin. I only ask your pardon."

Nora opened her eyes to see Philip lay his hand in that of the man who had so heartlessly betrayed him.

"I forgive you now," she heard him say. "I once thought I never should. You painted the Francesca di Rimini?"

"Yes. You noticed the likeness? And did you read the repentance and misery that could only paint such anguish?"

"I think I did," he answered.

Nora rose. "Did you paint that lovely, beautiful picture?" she asked, turning to the artist.

He bowed.

"I cannot think," she sighed, passing her hand over her brow, "how it is possible; but that is what has haunted me for years when I played '*Doux Souvenir*,' until the notes have come to sound like storm winds, and I could see so plainly those weary forms drifting hither and thither—one, ah! one was like you, only a shadow, and the other —"

"She is dead now," he said, hoarsely; "let her rest."

Nora turned gently, and gave him her hand. "I am sorry for you," she said.

Then Philip drew her away. Without a word he took her back to her friends, made his adieux, and left. She did not see him again for months. Then one day, when she was in her violet room, he came.

"I want to try an experiment," he said, after greeting her. "Have you ever played '*Doux Souvenir*' since that night?"

"Never," she replied.

"Do so now."

Nora shrank and shivered.

"I am certain the spell is gone," he said. "You have seen the picture in reality. You will not fear it now."

Then she obeyed. First came the hushed prelude, next the sighing, tender song, then the wailing sadness of the closing phrase; but her face no longer paled, a bright flush covered her cheeks, perhaps because Philip's arm was held around her, while her happy head leaned on his breast.

LITTLE MAID OF ARCADIE.

I.

THE evening sun is shining on her bright hair, and his horizontal beams would blind her eyes, but she is shading them with her small, brown hand. "I don't believe he is coming at all," she says, half-aloud, with a little pout. "It's very tiresome of him! But I'll just go a little way down the hill."

A glad voice comes up from under the dark shadow of the trees, calling her name. The light in her eyes prevents her seeing who it is, but she knows it is the man she came to meet. She sits calmly down on the bank by the road-side and fans herself with a huge piece of bracken. Love lends wings to the man's feet, and he approaches at an amazing rate.

"How good of you, Phyllis, to meet me," he exclaims. "I never expected to see you."

She goes on with her fanning quite briskly.

"It is dreadfully hot and dusty," she remarks, by way of exaggerating her goodness, ignoring *his* state of heat and dustiness, the result of his eagerness to reach her side.

"Then it is all the kinder of you."

"But I only came because there was nothing to do at home."

His face falls. "Haven't you a hand to give me, Phyllis?" he asks, quite humbly.

"George, you know how I hate shaking hands! And, besides it is too late now. Shaking hands is the *first* thing you do when you meet a person. I was wondering why you didn't offer to do it before."

"Phyllis," he exclaims, despairingly, "why it was you yourself who —"

"Indeed, it was no such thing!" she cries, indignantly. "I came to meet you all in this dust," holding out her pretty foot, finely powdered all over, "and I sat here waiting for you, and you came up, and never *attempted* to shake hands. If you are going to be cross, unjustly, I shall wish you were in London again!"

He knows of old how hopeless it is to argue with his pretty, disdainful cousin. "I have been in London a whole week!" he says, sadly. "It seems as though I had been months away from you."

"Dear me," she remarks, airily, "Does it? Then I suppose you did not enjoy going to London?"

"Enjoy it!" the simple fellow says, "how can I be happy away from you? Surely, you can see I don't look overwhelmed with happiness?"

"Now I look at you," giving him the merest glance, "you *do* look dull and—tired. But you see me now, don't you?" with a teasing, bewitching smile. "You have been staring at me for full *five* minutes! and how often have I told you how very rude it is of people to stare!"

He acknowledges the correction by guiltily turning his head away.

"If you are so tired," almost kindly, "why don't you sit down, pray?" He meekly accepts the offered place by her side.

"It is very odd," she muses, "that you should miss me so much. Now, when you're away I don't feel a bit lonely."

"I *know* you don't!" he cries, half-rising, stung beyond endurance, "Phyllis, don't you care for *anybody*?"

"O, yes," she retorts, saucily; "I love my father, and Tibby, and sometimes—when you aren't cross—I like you!"

He sits up and vainly tries to look into her lovely grey eyes. "Will you *ever* like me well enough to marry me?" he says at last, tempting his fate like many a man before him.

"Marry!" springing to her feet. "Why will you always tease, George? Haven't I forbidden you to say anything about such a thing? and you know when I said I would marry you, I meant in years and years."

"You don't think of me," the unlucky lover pleads. "If you had any heart at all you would take pity on me. And remember, if you *will* cause so much misery some of it is sure to return to you."

"There, now you have lost your temper again, I declare! If this is the way you go courting, what a husband you will make!"

"I don't know what makes me love you so much," he says, disconsolately, "you always quarrel with me. And why I'm unhappy away from you, I can't think, because you always make me wretched when I'm with you."

"Then don't come to me," gaily; "keep away! I told you before, I didn't miss you."

"Won't you say *one* kind word to me, Phyllis?" he entreats her. "All this last week I have comforted myself with the thought, 'Perhaps she will smile at me and speak kindly to me when I go back,' and now—O, Phyllis, what wouldn't I give if only you would love me a little!"

"Only a minute ago I told you I liked you *very much* when you weren't cross, and if you will promise not to say disagreeable things for a whole week—you know you say a week is such a long time—I will try to—to—"

"To what?" cries the incautious swain, the light of hope making his dark, passionate face look handsome.

"To forgive you for those you *have* said," the saucy maiden finishes, ungraciously, a minute after smiling most sweetly and innocently into his face which has grown so dark.

"Phyllis, you are heartless! I shall never know a day's happiness till you love me or I hate you!" He drops her hand, and without looking at her, turns to go.

"I *was* going to walk with him——" she says, slowly, apparently addressing a swallow that skims by. The much-enduring man turns eagerly. How completely she has him at her mercy.

"—— But I shan't now; oh, no!"

He moodily walks away again.

"Father wants you to come in this evening, George," she goes on, with a sudden assumption of friendliness, bringing him again to a standstill; "and I want you too," with the kindest of looks from the lovely grey eyes. "You haven't told me a word about London yet."

She turns away as she speaks, and springs lightly over the stile into the field, leaning over it to call to him. "Be sure you come, George; and don't bring that little black dog on your shoulder!" With a ringing laugh she lightly runs away.

Just as she reaches the next stile somebody else reaches it from the other side. She looks up, and her eyes encounter evident admiration in those of a well-dressed, handsome young man. He draws back slightly, and raises his cap.

"You were just going to get over the stile," he says, politely.

"And so were you!" she returns, partly to gain time. She has no fancy for climbing stiles with people looking on, especially, she feels, rather than thinks, this handsome stranger.

"Perhaps there is no need for me to do so. Can you tell me if this is the right way to the 'Magpie and Stump'?"

She ponders. Then she gives him directions so lengthy and complicated that the gigantic memory of a Macaulay would scarcely avail to hold them.

"I am very sorry," he says, apologetically, when she pauses, having landed him in imagination at the "Magpie and Stump;" but I am afraid I cannot remember one single thing!"

She repeats them, as briefly as possible. He protests his head is far too stupid to carry so much. Will she not come a little way, a very little way, to show him till he can find it for himself? His smile is so winning and his tones so honied, that:

"What time is it?" she asks, coming half a step nearer.

He unblushingly understates the hour by a full quarter.

"If only it wasn't so awkward and high," she murmurs, as a last faint protest, looking askance at the stile which divides them.

"We can easily manage that," he assures her. "See!" And in an instant he has helped her over.

"You are a stranger here, sir?" she asks, shyly, for the enormity of her conduct, in thus walking in the lonely fields with a stranger, suddenly reveals itself to her.

"Yes, I am down for some fishing." Then, seeing she instinctively looks for fishing-rods, he adds: "I have only just come—by the last

train—and I have lost my way in a maze of fields. Have you *no* roads down here?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I had just come from a road when I met you at the stile."

"And where does it lead to?"

"Only to my father's farm—Elmsover Farm."

"And is there any good fishing?"

"Yes," she says, "there are three good trout streams." But she is suddenly shy; this man is so far above her. He is a young god to her, as Theseus was to Ariadne. A few minutes later she stops.

"I think you will find your way now," she says, pointing down into the valley. "See. That white house is the inn."

"I ought to see you at least half-way home," he says, "it will soon be getting dusk, and you are alone——"

"Oh, no," promptly; "I am quite used to walk alone, and I shall be quite safe," inwardly wishing he would insist on accompanying her.

"Then, good-bye," he says; "and I have to thank my pretty little guide for a pleasant walk, besides her kind guidance."

She slowly raises her eyes, and, as she meets his admiring gaze, blushes deeply. All her thought on her homeward way is—"How different from George—how different from George!"

Alas, poor George!

II.

SHE stands with one finger pressed into her cheek, while the other hand holds aloft a white sun-bonnet, which she is regarding with high disdain.

"It look so very—*countrified*," she murmurs at last, in a tone of disgust. A movement of her arm, and the poor sun-bonnet flutters sadly to the floor, falling short of the bed at which it was aimed.

Her Sunday hat next undergoes inspection; a gorgeous erection, compiled by the best milliner in the place, and the admiration and envy of all the other village maidens. "I'm afraid—I'm afraid," she says slowly, "*he* would think it very—large, and—mixed!"

She finally dons the sun-bonnet, and Vanity whispers: "After all, it suits you best, and you won't get sun-burnt."

She walks up the shady lane, careful to look neither to the right hand nor to the left; not allowing, even to herself, that she hopes to see anybody.

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" sings a gay voice close to her, the remembrance of which has rung in her ears all night.

Looking up she sees *him*—the only name she knows him by.

"I am going blackberrying, sir."

"May I come, too?" persuasively; "I have not picked blackberries since I was a dirty little boy in jackets, and I don't suppose I

shall add much to your basket ; but may I come ?" He is not used to plead in vain.

"Yes, sir," with a swift, shy, upward glance, All her pretty impetuous coquetry has taken to itself wings.

"Then let us go at once. Give me your basket."

They walk on together, she vexed at not being able to chatter gaily as usual, and he thinking the country will not be so deplorably dull after all.

"You have not told me your name, child," he says, looking down from the hedge, as he throws blackberries into the basket she holds, thinking at the same time how exquisitely lovely is her upturned face.

"My name is Phyllis."

"It is a very pretty name, a sweet name, and it suits you to perfection."

"And your name—what is your name, sir ?" she asks, chiefly to cover her confusion.

"You are not to call me 'sir.'"

"Why not, sir ?"

"There you are again !" in pretended anger. "My name is Arthur Chesney, and, in future, child, mind you call me by it. It is absurd for you to say 'sir.'"

"Yes, sir." She makes him a little courtesy in mock humility.

How very sweet and *piquante* she is, he thinks. He has looked at her, so far, from a purely æsthetic point of view ; but—how pleasantly he can while away his holiday——

"Did you say you came down here to *fish*, Mr. Chesney ?" she asks, presently. She is fast regaining the use of her glib little tongue.

"Yes. Don't I look as though I could fish ? I used to flatter myself I was an angler born. However——"

"But you *aren't* fishing," with a small attempt at her old pretty, contemptuous manner.

"Suppose I found something better to do ?" he says, bending to see her under the sun-bonnet.

She timidly averts her eyes, while the crimson dyes her cheeks. Poor, ignorant child ! how should she know how little the tender tone and look are in earnest ?

"But I am going to begin business to-morrow," he continues, selfishly enjoying her pretty confusion. "I am going to fish in the brook that skirts Millbrook Farm. So you see, Miss Phyllis, I am not always idle ; and you must not curl up your lip so disdainfully, because I can work, I assure you !" pretending to be offended.

"Indeed I didn't, Mr. Chesney," she protests.

"But you did," he returns, appearing deeply hurt. "I didn't think it of you. I couldn't believe you would be so unkind."

"I wasn't," the simple child maintains, stoutly.

"Yes, I am really hurt," he continues ; "you looked as though you

thought me an idle, good-for-nothing fellow. Come now, confess——”

“No, I shan’t.”

“Perhaps, then, you thought me the best and handsomest man you ever saw?” This is too near the truth. She tosses her dainty head contemptuously.

“Indeed I never thought about you at all!” she declares, which is a lie on the face of it, Miss Phyllis, and you know it, and he knows it.

“Nay, that is the unkindest cut of all. Not once, really?”

“Oh, yes,” carelessly, “once. When I got home and saw the clock, I thought how wrong your watch must be!”

“Did your mother scold you, then? Poor child! all through your kindness to me.”

“I have no mother; and,” proudly, “no one ever scolds me.”

“Now, I will put you to the test. If you really and truly bear me no ill-will, you will come to-morrow and honour a lonely fisherman with your presence.”

“The basket is filling very slowly,” she remarks, gazing into it.

“Hang the basket!” Mr. Chesney exclaims; “will you come?”

“And do you suppose, Mr. Chesney,” with great severity, “that I have nothing to do but to please myself?”

“Oh, you acknowledge it would please you——”

“I really do think, Mr. Chesney,” with a saucy little nod, “that you are quite as fond of having compliments paid to you as of paying them to people yourself!”

This is such a home-thrust that he says hastily; “I really shall think as I say if you won’t come.”

“George *did* ask me if I would like to get some water-lilies from the mill-pond,” she says, slowly.

“Then come and gather water-lilies, like a sensible child.”

“Perhaps——” she says, and stops. “I will ask George if he can come to-morrow.”

“No, no!” he says, at once, looking on this proposal with much disfavour; “don’t ask George. I can get them for you.”

“I’ll see,” she answers, wisely.

“I knew she would come,” he says to himself next morning, by the brook-side. “What a sweet little thing she is!”

She comes slowly across the field in the brilliant sunshine, with her eyes carelessly fixed on the horizon. When she is within six yards of him she (apparently) first becomes aware of his presence, and gives a little start, as who should say, “I never thought to see *you* here!”

“Good morning, Mr. Chesney,” politely.

“How d’ye do?” he says, jumping up and taking her little bare hand. No waiting for *her* to shake hands, as George does.

“Any fish, Mr. Chesney?” she asks, with interest.

"One, a beauty, just as you came."

"May I see it?"

"Well, it has taken the bait, though I don't know whether I shall be able to land it. But if you want to see it——"

He leads her to the water-side, bids her look in, and she beholds—only her own beautiful face smiling up from the dimpling water.

"Oh, Mr. Chesney!" drawing back; "that is too bad. *You* are not a fisherman!"

"Indeed I am! I said I'd caught a beauty, and," triumphantly, "you can't deny it now you've looked in the brook!"

"You judge of fish by their *weight*," she says, severely; "and you can't say I'm *fat*!" as though defying contradiction, at the same time looking anxiously in his face. Suppose he should think her fat? Plump, she knows she is, but fat—oh!

"Heaven forbid!" with a shudder. "I have a horror of fat people. No indeed, little Phyllis, you are just right; you are perfection!"

"So George says," coily, addressing her remark to the brook.

"George!" he cries, "who is this George?" You are always talking of George. I am jealous of George. What right has he to say you are perfection?"

"I am going to marry him," she remarks, serenely, "and this is his farm," lifting little pebbles into the water with the toe of her shoe.

To do him justice he mutters to himself: "Then there must be an end to this pleasant fooling," and then an insane desire to supplant the luckless George in the affections of this lovely little ignoramus, seizes him, and grows, and grows.

"Do you like him?" he asks.

"Yes," calmly. "Oh, yes I like him when he is not cross!"

"And I suppose he adores you?" moodily.

"He would kill himself to please me," she says, quite as calmly, "and I'm sure I can't think why?"

"Phyllis," he suddenly says, but not so irrelevantly as it seems, "do you know how pretty you are? Long ago men would have fought for that sweet, little innocent face of yours. Do you know, I say, that you are perfectly lovely?"

"I ought to know it," demurely, "George says so often."

He utters a naughty word. "Don't talk to me of George," he cries, "I hate him!"

"Will you begin to *fish* now?" she enquires with feigned scorn. "I see you haven't even unpacked your rods!" at the same time seating herself comfortably on the trunk of an old fallen tree.

"Have you ever been to London, Mr. Chesney?" she asks, presently. London is almost more than heaven to her.

"Half the year," lazily, "I spend there."

She looks on him, if possible, with more admiration. He recounts to her its marvels, and she wonders secretly, bitterly, to herself, "Does he love any lovely London lady?"

"See, here is a beauty!" he cries, triumphantly, landing a fine trout.

"Ah, do show it me!"

He brings it. "Isn't it stunning?"

"What lovely little red spots. Oh," with a little start, "it is alive. Poor thing."

Mr. Trout gives a desperate leap and lands in her lap. With a pretty little scream she picks it up daintily, puts it into the water, and it swims ungratefully away.

"Oh, Phillis, how *could* you?" he exclaims, with a true fisherman's disappointment; "you have lost my best fish!"

"I was so sorry for it," she confesses. "I am sure it didn't like being caught."

"Oh, they like it well enough," carelessly. "You are a dear tender-hearted little thing, but I do wish you had spared my best trout. It was a pound and a half, I'll swear."

"I did spare it," she retorts saucily, "that is just what I did do. But smell my hands!"

He takes a little brown hand in each of his own, and then, obeying a foolish impulse, he imprints a kiss on each.

Before he has time or inclination to release them, he perceives a horror growing in her eyes, that no action of his could warrant, while the rich colour dies away in her cheeks.

Following the direction of her gaze, he sees on the other side of the brook, a man, whose eyes, beneath scowling brows, are fixed on them and literally flashing with rage.

With a look of hatred, as though he would wither his rival, the stranger turns and strides away.

"Who is he?"

"George," she says faintly, with a lovely, guilty blush, while her downcast eyes avoid his.

"Confound him!" mutters Arthur Chesney.

III.

A FORTNIGHT has passed, a happy, long fortnight for little Phyllis, for has she not talked with her hero every day? Slowly too, it has passed with George, for he has been racked by jealous pains, and passionate love, and horrible hatred.

It is evening, and he has been walking a little way along the lane with her.

"Good-bye, George," she says, as they reach a gate, "this is my nearest way."

"Are you going to meet that fellow in those fields?" he asks, angrily.

"No, I am not!" she retorts, saving her conscience by thinking "I really *didn't* promise." "You know it is my nearest way home; and, besides," warmly, "if he should happen to be in the fields, it would be no more an appointment than my meeting you two minutes ago!"

She is moving away, but he seizes her by the wrist; not roughly, for in all his passion of anger and jealousy, he is tender and careful of her.

"Phyllis," he says hoarsely, "you have run away from me and avoided me all this last fortnight, but you *shall* hear me now! However much you may go on philandering with that fellow, it is *me* you'll marry."

"George," imperiously, "loose me at once! I shall not talk to you when you can't keep your temper."

"Temper!" savagely, "how can a man keep his temper, pray, when the girl he is going to marry does as you do?"

"But are you going to marry me?" gaily. "I'm not at all sure about it; I haven't made up my mind!"

"No other man shall have you, and marry me you shall and must!"

"Then you will be a dog in the manger, for *you* will not have me," trying to make her voice sound jaunty, but she is beginning to be afraid of him, and his grip has tightened on her wrist.

"I swear by Heaven that I will marry you."

"George, George," in a trembling voice, "don't swear, because I cannot marry you."

"I have your promise. You are bound in honour to marry me!"

She stands perfectly still, and her face is fixed and white. With cruel delight he watches her distress and misery. Jealousy has changed the whole nature of the man.

"*I hate you, George,*" she hisses, under her breath.

"It is that confounded painted popinjay that has taught you to do so! *He'll* never marry you!" he says, brutally.

Poor George! His wrongs are many.

If possible, she becomes whiter than before, and her hand trembles in his grasp. "Mr. Chesney is a gentleman," she says pointedly, with flashing eyes; "and I will never marry *you*!"—with ineffable scorn. "Never! Not to save your life. What is a promise, compared with a whole life of misery, as mine would be, married to you? Rather than that, I would kill myself!"

She trembles violently, and can scarcely command her voice.

"Take care I don't kill you first!" he cries bitterly. "I don't know whether I love you or hate you most."

He looks more like a fiend than a man, so contorted with passion is his face.

She recoils from him in horror. He flings her hand roughly away from him. With horrified, fascinated eyes still fixed on him, she goes slowly backwards to the gate. Once through, she runs till she can run no more, and then sinks on a rustic seat, in a passion of terrified weeping.

She knows not how long it is afterwards, when—

"Crying, little Phyllis!" the voice that she has learnt to love so well exclaims.

Arthur Chesney throws away his cigarette, and comes to her side. He tries to remove her wet hands.

"Who has made my pretty Phyllis cry?" he asks tenderly, smoothing her gold-brown hair.

"He—said—George—," she stammers, brokenly, between her sobs.

"What did he say to you, poor little Phyllis?"

"He—he was very angry with me, because he said—you ought not to—to talk to me." Her tears run afresh. "And I know," miserably, "I have been doing very wrong this last fortnight."

He does not speak.

"And he—he says he will *force* me to marry him."

"Well?" almost coldly. Is the girl cunning, and going to make him pay for his fortnight's amusement? or is she innocent, and only unhappy?

"And now—I *cannot*!" she says piteously, lifting her miserable, loving little face.

Her tears, her loveliness, and the passion of the moment, carry him beyond the bounds of prudence.

"Phyllis!" he suddenly cries, framing her sweet, tear-stained face in his hands. "Phyllis, do you love me? Do you?"

The lovely, timid eyes confess what he knows so well. The colour floods her delicate face, and her lips quiver. Never has she looked so lovely. With a muttered exclamation of, "My darling!" he catches her to his heart, and showers kisses on her burning face.

"My sweet little Phyllis," he murmurs, stroking her soft cheek. "It was worth having you cry, for the pleasure of comforting you. Now let me look at you. Why, you aren't the same child that you were two minutes ago?"

"Of course I'm not," shyly raising her glorious eyes, shining with new-born happiness and love, to his face.

"And why aren't you?" He has never dreamt she was so charming.

"Now I know you care for me," she says ingenuously, "I don't feel the same person at all. Not a bit."

"My sweetest Phyllis!"

"I'm sure I'm *not* Phyllis! I must pinch myself to see."

She pinches her soft, round arm, and all the red blood comes running to the spot, to see what can possibly be the matter.

He fondly presses his lips to the spot. "I sha'n't allow you to hurt yourself," he says.

"Nothing can hurt me—now," she answers softly, with a contented little sigh, looking up to him with perfect faith.

Those gentle, trustful eyes pierce to his very heart. Who is he, to ruin her fair young life? Half-an-hour later he bids her good-bye, and watches her run up the garden and disappear into the old farmhouse, after waving him a happy, loving farewell.

"What a brute I am," he says, enduring a pretty sharp prick of

conscience, as he walks away. "A perfect brute, to go and leave her—as I must," he sighs; and I know the mater has a match ready for me with Lady Florence. Pity I'm not rich enough to marry as I like. As I like, did I say? Well, she *is* a little darling, to play with down here in Arcadia; but in town, or at the Towers——. And now, I suppose, I must go away at once; and yet, she is so sweet and bewitching. No name on earth is too bad for me!"

But he does not go away at once. He stays "yet other three days," happy days spent with Phyllis, the voice of conscience comfortably stifled; and then he goes to stay with Lady Florence at the Towers.

He feels the most despicable and the meanest of mankind as he says good-bye to her, and sees the love in her trustful eyes, heavy with bravely-suppressed tears. Though he keeps saying to himself, "In a week she will forget me," yet he knows all the time she will never forget him; and he cannot be sorry for it, because the foundation-stone of his character is vanity, and vanity the coping-stone.

The days go by, and become weeks. Weeks lengthen into months. Each Sunday she whispers bravely to herself, "This week I shall hear from him," and each Saturday, "Next week he is *sure* to write!" Loving, trustful, deserted little Phyllis.

On Christmas morning she meets the postman with eager expectation. Surely to-day she will hear from him. Christmas-time is dedicated to the memory of absent friends. Alas, no letter; not even a little card.

"Then he is coming," she murmurs, with happy self-deception. So true and simple herself, another's faithlessness is inconceivable to her.

New Year's Day is here, and he has not come. George overtakes her coming home from church.

"Isn't it cold and bitter?" she says, shivering, in such a sad and quiet little voice.

"Not for winter-time. You never used to feel the cold, Phyllis."

"Oh, yes; I *always* hated winter."

"But you used to run and slide. You never do now."

"I am getting too old, you know, George," with a wan, wintry attempt at a smile.

"You are only nineteen."

"I think," sadly, "that we must all have made a great mistake, and I am really a hundred."

There is several minutes' silence, and then he says, humbly: "I can see now, Phyllis, how hopeless it is to want you to love me. Forgive me, dear, for having ever tormented you; but I loved you so madly. I will not persecute you any more. It is not that I love you less, but I pity you."

"It is for you to forgive me, George," softly. "You have a noble nature," striving to make her voice calm. "I know you now as I never knew you. I could have loved you, perhaps, if ——"

"Don't, Phyllis, don't. You break my heart!"

Her only answer is a burst of tears.

Winter gives place to a sad, wet spring, and a white, patient Phyllis moves about her father's house and farm, never smiling, never singing, never complaining. It wrings George's true heart to see her so changed, so gently and patiently bearing her burden.

He is going to Australia, and constantly goes up to London, making necessary arrangements.

One March morning, when six weary months have dragged themselves on since that glorious September, she is going into the garden to gather the peeping primroses. As she passes the open door of the farmhouse parlour, she is arrested by hearing George's voice within. She thought he was in London.

"Ay, dead," he is saying, in hushed tones of awe; "dead as a stone."

What is this heavy sinking at her heart? Why should it have to do with her? She pauses, irresolute, a moment, and then, with trembling steps and ghastly, unreasonable forebodings, she enters the room.

"Poor child!" says her father, for he sees her white, drawn face. "Then you have heard?"

"Heard?" she almost gasps. "What, father?"

George says, brokenly: "A terrible accident happened to the night train from London—the train I came by—" and he hesitates.

"Well?" she says, with desperate calmness. "Go on." She leans heavily on the table.

He turns away his head, that he may not see her. "There were many people hurt, and—Mr. Chesney—was killed."

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cries triumphantly. "He was coming to me!" A glad light comes on her white face for one moment, and then her sorrow rushes on her. "Arthur," slowly and sadly, "I shall come to *you*."

And then, with a pitiful cry, that strikes terror to both their loving hearts, she falls to the ground. . . .

She does not guess, and George cannot tell her, that there was with him a fair girl, a two days' bride—Lady Florence.

But she does not die. She lives, a sweet, sad, little Phyllis, not quite so child-like as before. As days go on, that wondrous fortnight lives in her memory as a happy, fairy-like dream.

Nearly two years have gone by since Phyllis said good-bye to George. She sits in the glow of the setting September sun. A tiny slip of printed paper is in her hand.

"I have kept it so long," she murmurs, half-aloud, "shall I destroy it? I think I will—no." She hears a footstep on the gravel, and instinctively crushes it into her pocket. She raises her head, and sees two loving eyes fixed on her.

"George!" With a joyous cry she springs towards him, holding out both hands. The traveller presses them gently, and then releases them.

"Yes, George," he says; "the wanderer, George."

"You must be very tired," the kindest of maidens retorts, "sit here by me."

"I never wish to leave this spot again," the weary man says, with two-fold meaning, which his little cousin clearly sees.

"And now," she commands him, "tell me all about Australia."

"About yourself first, little Phyllis," he says, the same as ever.

"Well, the very first thing worth telling—" she hesitates—"was nearly a year ago"—she shyly glances at him, and gives him a little bit of crumpled paper.

George reads the account of the marriage of Lady Florence Chesney, the young widow of the Honourable Arthur Chesney, who was killed in a railway accident two days after his marriage. He returns it.

"Yes, Phillis?" he says in a low voice, not looking at her.

"I—I am not a child any more," she murmurs, with averted head.

"Thank God!" George says, earnestly. The air seems brighter and the birds sing more sweetly.

There is silence for some minutes, and then she says, with a saucy glance: "And do you still hate me?"

"Hate you! I never hated you. It would be impossible!"

Assured of this fact she goes on more comfortably. "I treated you very unkindly, George." He would begin an animated denial, but she waves her hand, and continues: "But really, you know, you were dreadfully solemn!"

"Yes," he admits with a sigh; "I was a fool to expect you to care for such a sober fellow as I am."

"I—I think I am a little more sober now," she says, in the sweetest little whisper.

He assents to this, but is far too simple and straightforward to perceive what is opened to him by these gentle insinuations.

"Was there *ever* anything so stupid as a man?" she asks herself. She taps her foot impatiently on the gravel, and he feasts his eyes, unchecked, on her lovely face.

"It was leap-year *last* year," she remarks, at last, with some emphasis and much meaning.

"Yes," says simple George, "I believe it was."

She is silent, and he is too happy for speech. Then, "How much do you like me now?" she says, with much innocence; "as much as that?" holding her hands about a yard-and-a-half apart.

"How much do you like me?" guardedly.

"Just as much as you do me!"

"That's impossible," the unconscious lover says, in a tone of deep conviction.

"I don't know," retorts Miss Phyllis, meditatively, resting her chin in her hand.

"Suddenly she turns her blushing face to him, "*Why* did you come home?" she asks. "Was it——"

Even he can read what her loving eyes say.

"Phyllis!" he exclaims, enraptured.

"Yes," she says, softly; "what?"

"My dearest!" he cries, no longer blind. "Phyllis, may I kiss you?"

"But surely," says naughty Phyllis, quaintly, "we are cousins. Why not?"

He clasps her in his arms. "Can you guess why I came home," he whispers.

The mischievous maiden whispers back, triumphantly: "I knew before you did!"

CONSTANCE A. M. COTTERELL.



A REQUIEM.

FORWARD! Alas, we cannot yet
Look forward thro' the winter night;
A friend is passing out of sight:
Can we, about his bier, forget?

We shared so many joys of his:
The growing marvel of spring leaves,
The brooding swallows in the eaves,
The white soul of the chrysalis;

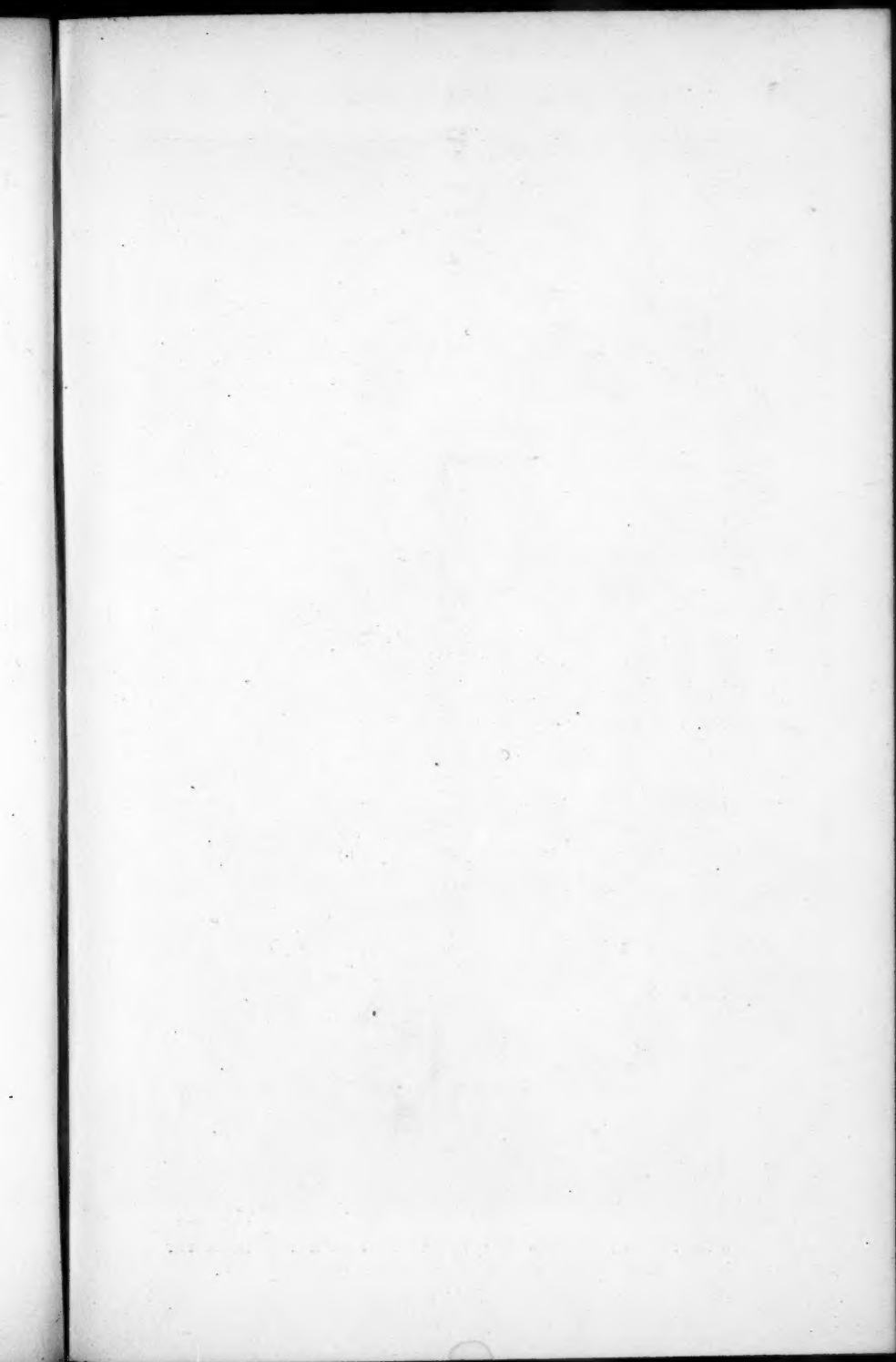
The blush upon the apple-tree,
The heavy-headed fields of June,
The bridging pathway of the moon,
In August nights, across the sea.

Some gusts of swiftly-driving rain,
Some tears there may have been as well:
But looking back, we only tell
That sunshine on the land has lain.

In vain we long to hold him here,
In vain we clasp him close and tight;
The bells break harshly thro' the night,
And our old friend becomes "last year!"

Forward! There may be much in store,
Ere long a Dawn of Hope be ours,
A child of Promise crowned with flowers—
But our Last Year comes back no more!

C. B. STUART.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"AND DO YOU REALLY MEAN TO SAY THAT THEY DO NOT AT HOME YET
KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?" HE ASKED GRAVELY.